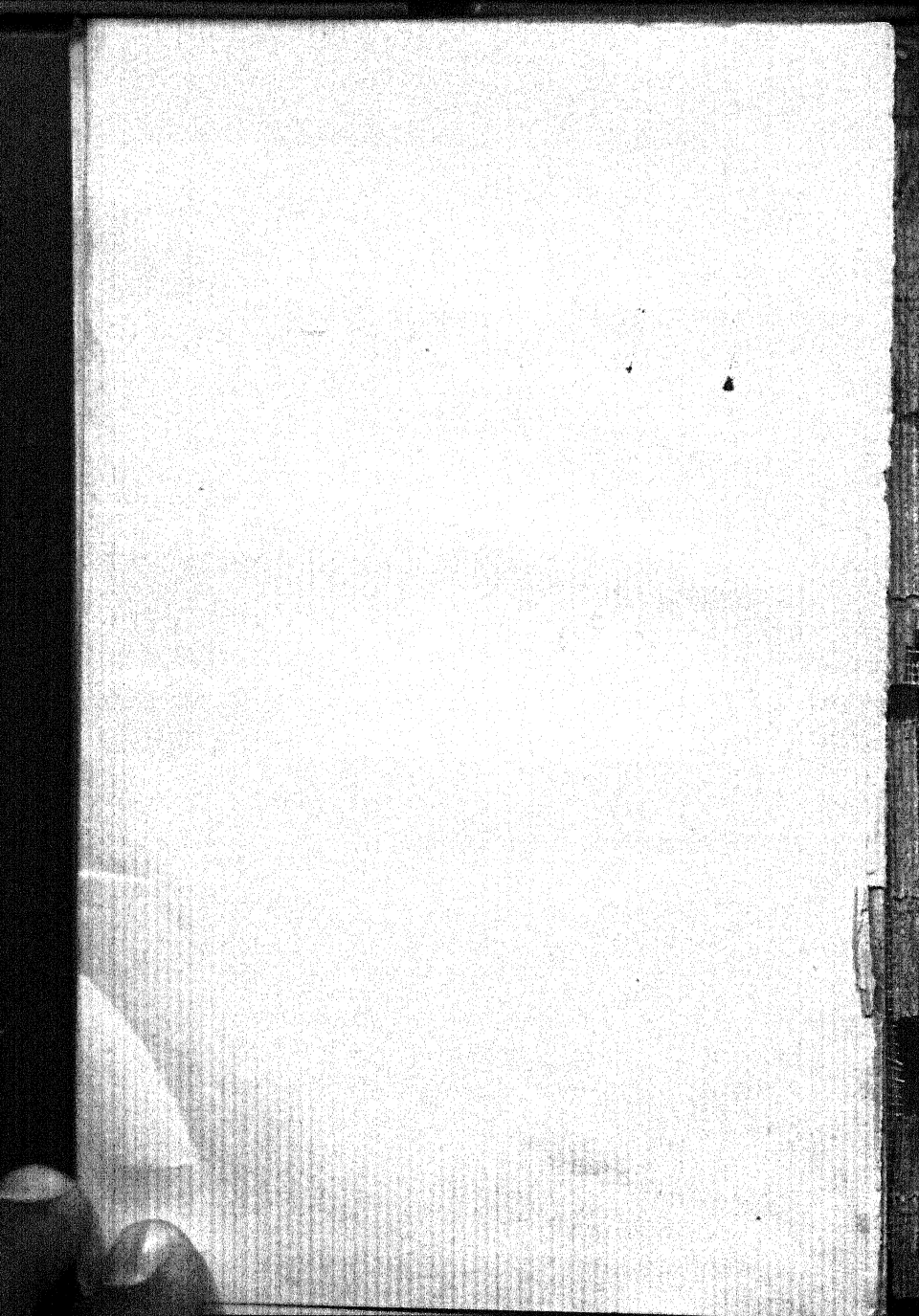


THE ELEMENTS OF THEOSOPHY

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Dedicated

WITH REVERENT LOVE

TO

MY TEACHER

PREFACE

DURING the last few years there has been an increasing need for some book that would give a fairly comprehensive outline of the nature and aims of the Theosophical Society, and of what are commonly called the 'Theosophical Teachings,' and would at the same time be sufficiently simple and free from Sanskrit terms to be easily readable by those who are only just beginning to study Theosophy. It is in consequence of this need, and in response to the request of many members in Australia, that this work has been undertaken. It is a very difficult task to reduce the 'Theosophical Teachings' to a form that would be readable by the average enquirer, as many of the ideas may be unfamiliar, and portions of the subject are in themselves abstruse and metaphysical. I have tried, however, to avoid the most difficult points, and have used but very few Sanskrit terms.

The book is intended to serve as an introduction to

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the study of Mrs Besant's *Ancient Wisdom*, and I have therefore to some extent followed the plan of that book, and have used some of the material contained in it. If it succeeds in helping some earnest seekers after truth in their search, and leads them to seek further light in the more advanced and comprehensive books on Theosophy, its purpose will have been fully served.

LILIAN EDGER.

January 1903.

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THE ELEMENTS OF THEOSOPHY

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN AND OBJECTS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

ABOUT twenty-five years ago there met in America two individuals, who have since become world-renowned by their initiation of a movement, whose chief aim has been to aid in the spiritual uplifting of humanity. These were Madame H. P. Blavatsky and Colonel H. S. Olcott, the co-founders of the Theosophical Society. They were drawn together by their interest in Spiritualism, meeting first in 1874 at the house of the Eddy brothers, at Chittenden, in the State of Vermont, U.S.A., where some striking spiritualistic phenomena were taking place. Colonel Olcott had long been studying and investigating Spiritualism, feeling that the line of investigation followed was not only interesting from a scientific point of view, but also most important from its religious aspect; for, if the discoveries which investigators claimed to have made were true, they should

furnish at least strong evidence, if not actual proof, of the existence of the soul after the death of the body. Having heard of the wonderful manifestations that were said to be taking place at the "Eddy Homestead," he went there for a few days to examine the phenomena for himself, and on his return wrote an account of what he had seen for the *New York Sun*. This excited so much interest that he was requested by the *New York Daily Graphic* to spend some time at Chittenden in its interest, investigating the phenomena thoroughly, and sending regular letters for publication, giving the results of his investigations. It was while he was engaged in this work that Madame Blavatsky came to Chittenden; indeed, it is said that the idea of going there was suggested to her by reading his letters.

She was already well versed in the knowledge of Eastern Occultism, and to her Spiritualism was but a stepping-stone by means of which the most thoughtful minds among the nations of the West might perhaps be led from materialistic scepticism to an appreciation of the magnificent spiritual philosophy of the East. She was associated with some great spiritual teachers, or adepts, in India, who had entrusted her with the work of initiating a great spiritual movement that should check materialism, should spread greater tolerance among the various religions, and should unfold to the world a part of the inner, occult truths, which were well recognised in more ancient times, though now withdrawn into the background on account of the growing materialism. It was thought that the spiritualistic movement might be

utilised for this purpose, and therefore Madame Blavatsky was directed to defend and substantiate the phenomena of Spiritualism, while at the same time gradually making known some of their many and varied causes other than the intervention of "departed spirits."

It was, however, impossible to utilise the spiritualistic movement in this way, and other means had to be used. But Spiritualism served the purpose of being the means of bringing together the two who were to initiate and establish the required movement.

The acquaintance begun at Chittenden ripened into a close friendship and comradeship, which continued after both Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott had returned to New York. Little by little she introduced him to a knowledge of the elements of Eastern Occultism, showing him how she herself could control the occult forces of nature, and telling him of the existence of the Eastern adepts under whose guidance she was working. Meanwhile she had on many occasions written articles for various journals in defence of Spiritualism, and had thereby brought herself prominently before the notice of the public. The way was thus prepared for the formation of the Theosophical Society; for a large number of clever and intellectual people, who were interested in occult matters, had gathered around her and Colonel Olcott, and frequently met at her house for the discussion of these subjects. In May, 1875, an attempt was made to form a "Miracle Club" for the private investigation of the various classes of phenomena. This failed, and the question of forming any definite organisation remained

in abeyance for some months. But in September, 1875, a private lecture, delivered at Madame Blavatsky's rooms by Mr Felt, revived the project. The lecture dealt with the connection between the hieroglyphics of Egypt and the rules of Grecian and Egyptian architecture, but in the course of it Mr Felt spoke somewhat fully of the skill in magic possessed by the ancient Egyptian priests. During the discussion that followed, Colonel Olcott, with Madame Blavatsky's concurrence, proposed that those present should form themselves into a society for the study of such subjects. They all fell in with the proposal, and Mr Felt promised to instruct them in certain branches of practical magic. So a meeting was held the following evening to discuss preliminaries, and appoint a committee to draft the constitution and by-laws. After several preliminary meetings, the Society was definitely organised on November 17th, 1875, with Colonel Olcott as President, Madame Blavatsky as Corresponding Secretary, and with some twenty members. It was called the "Theosophical Society," and its object was to "organise a society of Occultists, and begin at once to collect a library; and to diffuse information concerning those secret laws of Nature which were so familiar to the Chaldeans and Egyptians, but are totally unknown by our modern world of science."¹

During the first few years of its existence the Theo-

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, by H. S. Olcott, p. 120. I am indebted to this work for most of the information contained in this chapter as to the history of the Theosophical Society. Those wishing fuller details are referred to the book itself.

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sophical Society did but little *as a society*. Many of its original members soon withdrew, partly because Mr Felt did not fulfil his promise of giving instruction in magic, and so they did not have the sensational phenomena they had expected. A few meetings were held, papers on different subjects were read and discussed, a few experiments were made in psychic phenomena ; but at the end of a year or so little apparently remained of the Society but the form ; its members were reduced to its two founders, whose enthusiasm was undamped, and a few others who, with one or two exceptions, such as Mr W. Q. Judge, were but half-hearted in their adherence. But *as a centre of interest and influence* the Society was stronger than ever ; a large correspondence had been opened up by the founders, one or two Branch Societies had been formed, and communication had been established with several sympathisers in India and Ceylon.

In 1878 an attempt was made to amalgamate it with an Indian Society that was believed—mistakenly, as was afterwards proved—to be working on similar lines. When the mistake was discovered, the attempt was, of course, abandoned ; but it led indirectly to the removal of the founders to India, a step they had long wished to take, and to the remodelling of the objects of the Society. From this time its activity greatly increased, its membership was rapidly enlarged, and Branches were soon formed in various parts ; until, at the present time, about twenty-seven years after its formation, it has ~~about four hundred~~ Branches in

714 at the end of 1902

different parts of the world. Its influence has made itself felt in all directions in helping to broaden religious thought and to check the materialistic scepticism that is even still so widely spread.

Its objects, as remodelled, were three, and they are now worded as follows :¹—

1. To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science.
3. To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

Its platform has thus been made far more definite and comprehensive than it was at first; and the psychic, or occult, side of its work has been made of secondary importance as compared with the practical and religious. It is not that the importance of psychic phenomena is underrated. It is true that a knowledge of Eastern Occultism leads us to believe that we shall not, through such phenomena, obtain the evidence we want as to the immortality of the soul. They can at most but lead us one step out of materialism, to the recognition that there are other forces in addition to the physical ones that are known to science; that there appears to be substance which differs in its properties from any of the forms of physical matter with which science is familiar; that

¹ The wording of the three objects, but not the substance, was slightly changed when the constitution of the Society was revised in 1896.

thought is probably a force, subject to laws similar to those governing other forces ; and that the human consciousness is apparently able, under certain abnormal conditions, to function independently of the physical brain. Beyond this they do not seem likely to take us ; but in that they reveal to us forces that are not yet understood, faculties in man that are as yet only beginning to develop, they are worthy of close and careful study. For we cannot gain control over natural forces unless we understand them ; we cannot fully utilise our faculties unless we know what they are, and what is their legitimate use, what their abuse. Moreover, we frequently find these faculties developing in people who do not understand them, and who therefore need some help so as to protect themselves from the dangers that always accompany the ignorant use of strong forces. But for those who are equally ignorant to begin investigating independently, without training and without guidance, is like the "blind leading the blind," and is full of danger for all concerned. Therefore the leaders of the Society usually discourage students from pursuing the third object, unless they have exceptional advantages for so doing, or can place themselves under the guidance of advanced occultists. So the main energy of the Society is concentrated on the first and second objects.

The first is, indeed, the only one that is binding on all members, each one being expected to do what lies in his power towards the realisation of the ideal of Universal Brotherhood. All are left to do this in the way that seems best to them. There is such diversity of

opinion as to the best methods of improving social conditions that it would not be possible for the Society, *as a society*, to take up any special scheme; the prejudices and opinions of some of the members would inevitably be offended; and so the Society, by identifying itself with any one method, would practically shut out of its ranks those who disapproved of it. This would be fatal to its perfectly unsectarian character.

The second object is followed by the majority of the members, and is in some respects the most important. Many have not the opportunity of investigating various religious systems for themselves, but all can take advantage of the work that is done in this connection by others. The Theosophical literature, as a whole, embodies the result of their labours, so there is no difficulty for those who wish to study and find out at second hand. The pursuit of this object helps in the realisation of brotherhood. For there is perhaps no more fruitful source of unbrotherliness than religious intolerance. As a rule, this is due to ignorance, for if we study another religion than our own we find so much in it that we can sympathise with and admire that there is no room left for intolerance. We are, indeed, often surprised to find how much similarity there is between systems of thought which we had supposed to be almost entirely opposed to each other. We also find that the comparative study of religions leads us to a fuller knowledge of our own and a deeper appreciation of its inner meaning and spirit.

The Theosophical Society is thus no new sect; it does not aim at propagating some new religion. No one is

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asked what religion he belongs to when he wishes to join; there are in the Society Christians, Parsis, Hindus, Mohammedans, Buddhists, men of all shades of opinion; there are members who profess no religion, free-thinkers, materialists. The joining of the Society in no way interferes with the religion of the individual; he is not asked to leave his own church, he is not asked to subscribe to any creed or dogma. All that is asked of him is that by his life he shall try to bring nearer the realisation of the ideal of brotherhood, and that in all matters of opinion, whether religious or otherwise, he shall show to those who disagree with him the same perfect tolerance that he would wish them to show towards him. The Society, in short, is a band of students, who try to bring to their study, especially of philosophy and religion, an open and unprejudiced mind, a recognition that the knowledge of any individual is limited and imperfect, and a willingness to receive truth, in whatever direction they may find it, and thus add to their store of knowledge.

CHAPTER II

WHAT THEOSOPHY IS

THE question will now naturally arise as to why the Theosophical Society is so named and as to what Theosophy really is.

It has been said that by comparing various religions we find more similarity than we might at first have expected. Indeed, it is now universally admitted by students and thinkers that there are many broad truths taught alike by all the great religions of the world. But it is doubtful how far the average man or woman recognises this fact; for at first sight the differences attract our notice far more than the points of resemblance. For the differences are mainly in the externals of religion, that is, in the forms or ceremonies, and creeds or dogmas; and to many these practically constitute the whole of religion. It is when we seek for the truth underlying the creeds and ceremonies that we find the similarity, and we then also find that the creed is generally a rather imperfect expression of that truth, and that the real meaning of the ceremonies has in some cases been lost or forgotten.

Various reasons have been suggested for this similarity. Some think it shows that the later religions are merely copies of the earlier ones, modified so as to suit the difference in epoch and in nation; but this seems hardly likely, for we find the similarity in cases where there is no record of a sufficiently close association between the nations to account for it on that supposition. So it seems more reasonable to account for it according to the belief of others who think that all the great systems have come from one common source, and taken their individual colouring from the epoch and race to which they have belonged. But the question then arises as to what that common source is, and here again there is great difference of opinion. Some assert that it is purely natural; that all religions have sprung from man's observation of natural phenomena. The savage mind, undeveloped and untutored, has been filled with awe at the power shown in the great catastrophies of nature, and the ruin and devastation that follow in their train. Man has felt himself a mere puppet in the hands of the various forces of nature, and in his ignorant fear has deified them, regarding them as actual intelligent beings capable of destroying him in their wrath, or, if propitiated by gifts and sacrifices, of withholding their anger, and bestowing on him their beneficent favour. And thus, by gradual degrees, religions have been formulated alike in their main characteristics, but differing in details, owing to local colouring. This theory, ingenious and plausible as it may be, is based on mere speculation, and does not explain the fact that men of brilliant genius, even in this

day of advanced learning, still find satisfaction of both mind and heart in the teachings of religion. Or, if we look into the history of the past, we find that there also the most earnest and devout teachers of religion have frequently been noted, not only for their purity of life, but also for their logical and philosophical power, and for their deep knowledge of the laws of nature. Surely that which is the mere fruit of ignorance could hardly satisfy the cravings of acute reasoners and deep thinkers! The mind and heart of man both rebel against the thought of this "natural" origin of religions. As Mrs Besant says: "Thus speak the doctors of 'Comparative Mythology,' and plain people are silenced, but not convinced, under the rain of proofs; they cannot deny the likenesses, but they dimly feel: Are all men's dearest hopes and loftiest imaginings really nothing more than the outcome of savage fancies and of groping ignorance? Have the great leaders of the race, the martyrs and heroes of humanity, lived, wrought, suffered, and died deluded, for the mere personifications of astronomical facts?"¹

Others, therefore, believe that all religions are divine in their origin, are due to inspiration by God, and that their common source is thus the very thought and being of God Himself. The great founders of religious systems, whether regarded as Prophets, Teachers, or Saviours, thus stand forth from the rest of humanity as beings of great wisdom and purity; either perfected human beings, according to what some think, or, in the opinion of others, special incarnations, or manifestations,

¹ The *Ancient Wisdom*, by A. Besant, p. 3.

of the Divine Life, or even of God Himself. Because of their great knowledge and purity they were able to receive, through the inspiration of God, a truth which could not have been understood by average humanity. This they taught to men, as far as was possible ; clothing it in allegory and symbol, so as to convey the abstract ideas better by presenting them in concrete form. And to impress them the more vividly on the mind, they further instructed men in various forms of worship, and ceremonies, by which they were to try to approach nearer to God ; while they gave them certain short concise statements of the philosophical truths they wished especially to teach. Each founder would give the same basic teaching, for the truth as to God and nature must be one ; but he would present it in the form that would best appeal to those he was teaching, and he would select those portions of the truth that would be most helpful to them. Hence each religion would be only a partial presentation of truth, differing from others in form and ceremonial.

In the course of time their followers formulated still more definite creeds and rituals ; and as their understanding of the teachings would necessarily be imperfect, owing to their more limited knowledge and less advanced stage of development, these creeds were likely to be imperfect, and in some instances, probably, even inaccurate representations of the original teaching. The preconceived ideas and prejudices of those who formulated them would introduce a certain "personal factor," which would still further emphasise

the differences in the external forms of the various systems.

If, then, we wish to find the inner truth of religion, we must penetrate behind creeds and forms : and this can be done better by a comparison of various systems than by the study of only one. For in this way we shall be better able to see the meaning of forms and symbols which vary in different systems, but have some points in common that will indicate the true interpretation. We shall also be able to sift out the philosophical points in which the systems differ, which will in many cases be the result of the incompleteness and inaccuracy already referred to ; while the points in which they coincide may, broadly speaking, be regarded as belonging to the common source. Thus we can build up, with a fair degree of accuracy, so much of the universal truth as has yet been given to the world, remembering always that, as humanity is as yet far from perfect, so will the truth already known be but a part of the whole.

"The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His word."

Yes, and His word is not confined within the covers of any single book, nor even within any collection of books. It may be perceived in nature, in every blade of grass that rustles in the breeze, in every flower that opens its petals to the sunshine, in every bird that sings on the tree, in every insect that hums around, and in every human being fulfilling his daily tasks. So we must add to our study of religion that of nature and of life, recognising that all knowledge, all truth, all good, have

their source in the Divine, and that all our systems of thought, philosophical, scientific, and religious, are but fragments of one great whole.

Now Theosophy, or Divine Wisdom, is the name given to this great whole, and includes *all* truth, both that which has been given to man up to the present, and that which will be given in the future. None can claim to *know* Theosophy; we can but study it patiently and humbly, ever learning more, but ever becoming more and more conscious how much still remains to be learned. The second object of the Society may therefore be defined as the study of Theosophy, and so no more suitable name could have been chosen than the "Theosophical Society."

It is clear, then, that there can be no opposition between Theosophy and religion; it is, indeed, in Theosophy, as we learn more and more of it, that we shall find the reconciliation of the different religious systems, the different sects of any system, and also the reconciliation between religion and science, and between religion and philosophy. There appears to be opposition now only because man sees in each but a fragment of the truth, and mistakes that fragment for the whole.

The chief aim of our present study of Theosophy will be to try to find some teaching which will throw light on at least some of the difficult problems of life. We are continually confronted with questions to which it is difficult to find a satisfactory answer. What is the purpose of our existence here? What is it tending

towards? What is the meaning of evil? What the use of suffering? What is man, and what is his ultimate destiny? How can we account for the apparent injustices of life? Why do some appear to have everything that man could desire, while others experience trouble after trouble, until they seem as if they must be overwhelmed by the excess of their misfortunes? Why do we see a constant strife of man with man, class with class, nation with nation, while yet men recognise that brotherhood is the ideal they should try to reach? What is the law underlying all the life we see around us, and governing existence throughout the universe? Such are a few of the questions that confront us and demand an answer. Perhaps the one that comes nearest home to us is the question of the purpose of human life. For there is so much suffering, so much that at times seems utterly wrong, that we are almost tempted to think that there is no good purpose in life, and that we are but the victims of some cruel force which drives us hither and thither without either intelligence or love. Religion tells us that we are the children of God, of a loving Father, that He is guiding our lives in order at last to bring us to Himself, and that all which appears so cruel and inexplicable to us is but the mysterious working of His providence. And so some will tell us that we should trust everything to Him without questioning, and should rest content that at last all will be made clear, and we shall recognise the loving purpose which has been guiding us all through, and the joy we shall then experience will more than compensate for the present pain. And many are satisfied

with this assurance, and strive to make their lives as pure and noble as they can, so that they may be the more worthy of that joy which they are told is in store for them. We love and admire such men and women as these, for their lives are full of patient endurance, of loving service, of earnest effort to reach the highest ideal they can conceive. But still there are many whose intellects are too keen and active to be content to accept, *without understanding*, an assurance which seems to be belied by the facts they see around them. So they seek some further teaching which shall satisfy their intellectual cravings, and shall show how the teaching of religion can be reconciled with fact.

Now there is one teaching found in many religions which, if true, throws light on this problem, and offers a solution that has to many brought so much comfort and strength, that it is at least worthy of careful consideration by all, since, perhaps, to others also it may bring the same help. It is the teaching that our life, as we are experiencing it to-day, is neither the beginning nor the end of our existence; that the body in which we are living now is but a form that we are using for the time, but that *we ourselves* have existed before this body was born and shall continue to exist after it has died. That we have in ourselves a potentiality of evolution which can be developed by means of experience, and that we are brought into physical life for the sake of gaining it; that our development began ages ago, so that our present condition is the result of a long course of evolution of the individual self in the past. The differences we see

to-day in the characters of men will thus be the result of differences in the length of time their evolution has been going on; those who show a less developed character do so simply because their experience in the past has been shorter and therefore less complete, while those who are higher and more developed than their fellows have had a longer course of experience, and therefore greater opportunities for growth; but in the course of time ample opportunity will come to all for the full development of all their latent faculties and capacities. The purpose of life is thus the gaining of experience for the sake of development, and not only our present character, but also our present environment, is the outcome of our past; our surroundings are exactly what are rendered necessary by our past evolution; and the differences in the environment of different individuals are due to the fact that they are at different stages in their growth, and each stage requires its own peculiar conditions to enable them to reach the next stage.

Some are, in fact, the child-souls of the great human family, others the grown-up brothers and sisters. And as, during a single life, we need in our childhood quite different surroundings, occupations, and training from those which will suit us when we have reached mature manhood and womanhood, so is it in the long series of lives through which we are evolving.

Such is the broad statement of this teaching, but in order to understand it and see how reasonable it is, and also to fill in the details, we must study the main teachings of the great religions of the world as a whole, and

place this one in its right position with relation to the others.

The most important teachings that we shall find in all religious systems, more or less clearly expressed, are the following :—

1. That there is one Infinite Reality, underlying all manifestation, all phenomena, but unknown and unknowable by our finite intelligences.

2. That from this Infinite Reality there proceeds the manifested God, the originator and sustainer of the universe, as yet but partially known to us, but knowable to a greater and greater degree as we advance in our evolution.

3. That there are many mighty intelligences, whether we call them Archangels, Angels, Devas, or by any other name, who are subordinate to the manifested God, and are His agents in the carrying out of His thought and will.

4. That the whole universe is a manifestation of the life of God.

5. That man is divine in essence and in potentiality.

6. That he will attain the realisation of his own divinity and also of the unity underlying all existence by means of experience, which will bring out into activity all the latent possibilities of his nature.

7. That his development, like that of all other beings, takes place subject to the law of evolution, one aspect of which is the law of cause and effect.

CHAPTER III

TEACHINGS AS TO GOD AND NATURE

THE existence and nature of God is one of the subjects that have caused the greatest differences in religious opinions, and it has also given rise to the greatest scepticism and doubt amongst the most intellectual minds. And little wonder! for all efforts to define or describe God are the efforts of the finite to understand the infinite, and must be utterly inadequate. Yet inadequate as they are, the human mind seems unable to rest without making some efforts to understand God; even as a little child, whose intelligence is but just beginning to awake, seeks to understand the mother who is to it the source of everything that gives happiness. And so every religion sets out with the attempt to convey to man some apprehension of the divine, or to suggest some line of thought and of development by which such apprehension may be reached.

The exponents of science are also working, though in some cases unconsciously, towards the same end, in their efforts to investigate the phenomena and laws of nature, and to fathom the mysteries of life. By observa-

tion, experiment, and deduction they work from below upwards, from without inwards, from the form, the body, to the life, the spirit within; while religion throws down from above a faint reflection of the light of the spirit itself to illumine the work of science; only a faint reflection as yet, for our eyes are but just beginning to open, and the full radiance of the divine would only dazzle and blind us, instead of lightening the darkness for us. Yet that faint reflection, taken side by side with the teachings of science, is sufficient to give us some dim perception of the great Reality, which is as yet far beyond our comprehension.

Taking first the scientific view we find there are two great principles underlying all phenomena—matter, and energy; they are inseparable, for there is no matter in which some energy is not working, no energy which is able to work except in some form of matter. They are indestructible; ever changing their form, yet themselves never destroyed. For instance, if a piece of wood is burned, the form is gone, and a superficial observer might think the quantity of matter had been made less; but a student would know that if the products of combustion, the ash that was left, the smoke, gases, and vapour that had escaped, were weighed, they would represent the same quantity of matter as the original piece of wood together with the oxygen from the atmosphere that has been used in combustion. The greater part of it has passed into a subtler form, but it is still in existence, and will be built up into other forms. Who can say, indeed, but that some of it, after passing perhaps through

many transformations, may be absorbed from the soil by the roots of some forest tree, or inhaled by its leaves from the atmosphere, and becoming at length a part of the tissue of the tree may ultimately reappear in an exactly similar form to that which was burned! Or, if a body be pushed up a slope, one might imagine that the energy expended was lost beyond recovery; yet here again it requires but an elementary knowledge of science to know that it is stored in the body as potential energy—an energy depending on its position above the surface of the earth; and by means of pulleys or other machinery it could be utilised to raise another body, or to do various kinds of work, by simply allowing the body to fall to its original level. If the work thus done were measured, due allowance being made for friction, generation of heat, and other causes of apparent loss of energy, it would be found to be the equivalent of the work done at first in raising the body. Or if a cannon-ball were fired into a block of ice it would probably be imbedded in it; here, again, the energy would apparently be lost, but in reality it would only have changed its form; for the checking of the motion would have generated heat, another kind of energy, some of which would have been utilised in changing the form of a portion of the ice, and converting it into water. Even this heat is not lost; it is, as it were, locked up in the water, causing it to remain liquid, and would be given off again, as any student of science will know, if the water were again to freeze. Thus we could go on tracing the possible transformations of

energy, and at each transformation it could be shown by experiment that, provided all the factors which enter into the process are taken into account, the energy at the end is equivalent to that at the beginning, or, at least, that there is no difference which can be measured by any of our present instruments.

This indestructibility of matter and energy has led to the dream of scientists as to a unity underlying each. In the old days it was thought that the various forms of energy were due to different causes, or forces, as they were called; but this idea has long been abandoned, and it is universally recognised that all forms of energy are but modes of motion, or vibrations differing in rate and in character. Several years ago Sir William Crookes drew up a table of vibrations which clearly illustrates this point. Beginning with 32 vibrations per second he points out that the "atmospheric vibration reveals itself to us as sound. Here we have the lowest musical note." The vibrations of sound cover a range from 32 vibrations per second to 32,768; beyond that limit we find that the vibrations act no longer in the atmosphere, but in that less dense medium known to science as ether; and the set of vibrations from 32,768 to 34,359, 738,368 include the various manifestations of the force known as electricity. Beyond these is a set of which the function is not yet known; then follow the vibrations of heat and light, then another set of which the functions are suspected but not definitely known, while the vibrations known as the "X rays of Professor Röntgen" probably cover the next set. Beyond that we know

nothing.¹ Now we notice here that not only are these forms of energy different kinds of vibration varying in rate, but the medium through which they are transmitted is not the same for all. Moreover, Sir William Crookes points out that in the case of the very rapid vibrations the same laws do not hold as with the less rapid; for example, the Röntgen Rays "cannot be regularly reflected from polished surfaces; they have not been polarised; they are not refracted on passing from one medium to another of different density;" phenomena which are all well known in connection with light. It is even suggested, *as a possibility*, that there may be yet more rapid vibrations, and that these may perhaps be connected with the various phenomena associated with thought.² May it not be that all forms of energy are the result, or the *manifestation*, of one original force, which acts differently according to the circumstances amid which it acts?

With regard to matter, also, there is far less essential diversity than was formerly supposed; and many scientists are inclined to think that probably the chemical elements are themselves various compounds of a much smaller number of elements. Sir William Crookes put forward, some years ago, his belief that in all probability there is *only one* fundamental substance, which he called *protyle*, and that the differences in the elements are due simply to the various ways in which the atoms of this substance are built into molecules. Experiments have been made

¹ Inaugural address to the Psychic Research Society, Jan. 29th, 1897, quoted in *Bonderland*, vol. iv. pp. 137, 138.

² *Ibid.*

in various directions which tend to add support to this. Not long ago a report appeared in *Nature* (June 22nd, 1899) of an address given at the Royal Institution by Preston, on the effect produced on the spectra of different elements by passing the ray of light through the magnetic field or by placing the source of light between the poles of a horse-shoe magnet. He explains that the result of the experiments made, and of the mathematical calculations based on them, shows a striking resemblance in the effects on the spectra of the elements, indicating that there is a close relationship among the elements belonging to the same chemical group, or possibly even among those belonging to different groups. "We are led to suspect that not only is the atom a complex composed of an association of different *ions*, but that the atoms of those substances which lie in the same chemical group are perhaps built up from the same kind of ions and that the differences which exist in the materials thus constituted arise more from the manner of association of the ions in the atom than from differences in the fundamental character of the ions which build up the atoms; or it may be indeed that all ions are fundamentally the same, and that differences in the character of the vibrations emitted by them, or in the spectral lines produced by them, may really arise from the manner in which they are associated together in building up the atom. This may be an unjustified speculation, but there can be no doubt as to the fascination which enquiry of this kind has always exerted, and must continue to exert over the human

mind From time to time the hope has been entertained that metals may be transmuted, and that one form may be converted into another, and although this hope has been more generally nurtured by avarice and by ignorance rather than by knowledge, yet it is true that we never have had any sufficient reason for totally abandoning that hope ; and even though it may never be realised that in practice we shall be able to convert one substance into another, yet when the recent developments of science, especially in the region of spectrum analysis, are carefully considered, we have, I think, reasonable hope that the time is fast approaching when intimate relations, if not identities, will be seen to exist between forms of matter which have heretofore been considered as quite distinct. Important spectroscopic information pointing in this same direction has been gleaned through a long series of observations by Sir Norman Lockyer on the spectra of the fixed stars, and on the different spectra yielded by the same substance at different temperatures. These observations lend some support to the idea, so long entertained merely as a speculation, that all the various kinds of matter, all the various so-called chemical elements, may be built up in some way of the same fundamental substance ; and it is probable that this protyle theory will, in one form or another, continue to haunt the domains of scientific thought, and remain a useful and important factor in our progress, for all time to come." Or, we might suggest, until it passes out of the domain of *theory* into that of accepted scientific *fact*.

Another scientific principle which we must note is that vibrations of different kinds have an important effect on the state of a substance due to the re-arrangement of the molecules, and on its composition, due to the re-arrangement of the atoms of which the molecule is built. For example, if a lump of ice is heated, that is to say, if vibrations belonging to that set which we call heat are passed into it, it is changed into water; the motion of the molecules is altered, so that instead of being built into a fairly rigid form, they lie loosely one on another. If more rapid vibrations of the same kind are passed into the water thus obtained, the molecules are driven still farther apart, until their cohesive attraction is overcome, and they fly away from one another; in other words, the water becomes steam. But still the molecules themselves remain the same, unchanged in constitution; it is only the state of the substance that has been changed. If another class of vibration, that which we call electricity, is passed through the water, the molecules are broken up into their constituent parts, and instead of the water we shall have the two gases, oxygen and hydrogen, of which it is composed. Or to take another illustration, it has been discovered by a series of experiments, that if oxygen is electrified, a modification of it called ozone is produced; it differs from oxygen in various respects, possessing a peculiar smell, and showing greater chemical activity. After careful investigation, scientists have reached the conclusion that the molecule of ozone consists of *three* oxygen atoms, while the ordinary oxygen molecule consists of only *two* such atoms, the difference in the character-

istics of the gases being due simply to this difference in the combination of the atoms in the molecule. So that we have here also an illustration of the *possibility* of substances of different characteristics being built up from the same original element.

These are some of the most important principles with regard to energy and matter that science has unfolded to us. It observes facts and phenomena, and draws conclusions from them, but leaves their ultimate causes untouched. Philosophy then steps in to investigate these, and to examine into the real nature of force and consciousness. Some hold that matter contains in itself the "potency of all forms of life," and is thus the one reality at the basis of all phenomena; others trace all back to force, claiming that the atom has no existence save as a centre of force. Others again regard mind as the only reality, claiming that matter in all its various manifestations has no existence whatever apart from the mind of the person who observes them; while some say that matter and force are complementary aspects of some unknown reality which underlies both. As Mr Herbert Spencer says: "I have repeatedly and emphatically asserted that our conceptions of matter and motion are but symbols of an Unknowable Reality; that this Reality cannot be that which we symbolise it to be: and that as manifested beyond consciousness, under the forms of matter and motion, it is the same as that which, in consciousness, is manifested as Feeling and Thought. . . . I recognise no forces within the organism or without the organism, but the variously conditioned

modes of the universal immanent force, and the whole process of organic evolution is everywhere attributed by me to the co-operation of its variously conditioned modes, internal and external.”¹

If now we turn to the teachings contained in the various religious systems regarding the origin and evolution of the universe, we shall find how closely they are in accord with these scientific and philosophical conclusions. They all begin with a duality, the correspondence on the highest plane of energy and matter on the lowest. In the Christian Scriptures we find, “The Spirit of God moved (or brooded) upon the face of the waters.”² Now “water,” “the vast deep,” “the ocean,” is used again and again as a symbol for a homogeneous primordial substance out of which we are told the universe was evolved by the energy of the divine thought. A similar symbol occurs in the Hindu Scriptures. A vast expanse of waters, perfectly still, perfectly void. Beneath it, unseen, lies Vishnu in his form of Narayana, sleeping on the serpent of eternity. He awakes, and becomes conscious of a desire for renewed activity and manifestation. So he sends forth from himself, for he contains within himself the potentiality of all forms, a lotus flower, the symbol of manifested life. The beauty and radiance of the flower was like unto that of the sun, and a thrill passed through that “huge deep” as it appeared on the surface of the waters, so that ripples spread outwards in all directions. Then in the centre of the flower appeared

¹ Appendix to *Principles of Biology*, vol. i. p. 491.

² Genesis, chap. i., v. 2.

Brahmâ, the god of creation. The ripples grew into waves, until the whole ocean began to rise and fall with the mighty vibrations of Narayana's thought. And as Brahmâ sat in the lotus-flower in the midst of these surging waves, he remained still and silent, meditating for the space of a hundred years. And then, sending forth the energy of his thought, he brought into being "the three worlds," and all that is contained therein.¹

Another suggestive symbol is the churning of the ocean of milk by the Devas and Asuras, the positive and negative forces of nature; where differentiation was produced in that which was before homogeneous, as the butter is separated from the butter-milk.

Thus, just as we have seen that different vibrations cause substances to assume different forms, so did the thought of the Logos differentiate the homogeneous substance of space into all the different elements which already existed, *in latent possibility*, within it. And so there came into existence first the ether (not the ether of science, but a far more ethereal substance, sometimes called Âkâsha); then, in regular succession, the air, fire, water, and earth. In the Christian Scriptures we have practically the same order—light, the firmament or air, water, earth; light, the subtlest of the known forms of energy, taking the place of the Âkâsha, with which it naturally corresponds, and fire being omitted. The cause, too, is practically the same; in the one case the "brooding of the spirit of God," in the other, the thought of the Logos.

¹ See *Bhâgavata Purâna*, Book iii., chaps. 8, 9, and 10.

But religion, like philosophy, goes behind this duality ; only, unlike philosophy, it speaks with more certain voice, for it is the word of those who, *having seen, know*, while philosophy is the word of those who, not having yet seen, reason by analogy from that which they know to that which they only think. So we are taught that beyond the duality is unity, the Absolute, the One Reality, the Unknowable. Of THAT we can say nothing, save that IT is ; IT is unmanifested, and all we can know of IT is that IT is beyond our power of knowledge. "HE is unknown to who so think they know, and known to who so know they know HIM not."¹ We are reminded here of the conclusion reached by Mr Herbert Spencer as to the Unknowable, a conclusion reached also by many other philosophers. From IT there comes forth, in some way that we cannot understand, the Manifested God, the Creator of the Bible, the Logos of the Greek philosophers, the Lord, Ishvara, of the Hindu philosophy, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrian. This is the "personal God" of so many exoteric religions, not personal in the sense of anthropomorphic, but in the sense of being "masked," concealed under a form, because the very essence of manifestation is concealment and limitation, and yet revealed to us through the form, because we are not yet able to form any conceptions outside of form. This is the highest that we can ever strive to conceive. Before the Absolute, the Unknown, we can but bow in reverent homage, saying, as was said in an

¹ From the Kena Upanishad. See *Secret of Death*, Sir Edwin Arnold, p. 24.

old Egyptian hymn: "The Gods bow before Thy Majesty by exalting the Souls of That which produceth them . . . and say to Thee: Peace to all emanations from the unconscious Father of the conscious Fathers of the Gods. . . . Thou producer of Beings, we adore the Souls which emanate from Thee. Thou begetteth us, O Thou Unknown, and we greet Thee in worshipping each God-soul which descendeth from Thee and liveth in us." As Mrs Besant points out, the "conscious Fathers of the Gods" are the Logos under its various forms, the "unconscious Father" is "the One Existence, unconscious not as being less, but as being infinitely more than what we call consciousness, a limited thing."¹ But of the Logos we can form some conception, imperfect and inadequate though it be; and as we ourselves evolve, so shall our conception evolve, ever coming a little nearer to the reality, until at last we shall "know as we are known," and see "face to face."

In all religions the Logos in manifestation appears under a triple form, a Trinity, sometimes spoken of as the First, Second, and Third Logos. In Christianity it is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in the Hindu teachings it is Siva, Vishnu, and Brahmâ. The Second and Third persons of the Trinity represent the Logos in partial activity, each of them characterised by one special function, the second by Love, the third by Intelligence or Thought; while the First Person represents the synthesis of the activity of the Logos, and is therefore characterised by pure self-consciousness. It is the Third Logos, the

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 23.

spirit of God, or Brahmâ, whose activity first appears in the manifestation of the universe. It is He who, sending forth His thought, "moves on the face of the waters," and brings into being, as has been already described, the different kinds of matter of which the universe is to be built.

To take these in somewhat greater detail, we are told that there are seven great classes, or planes, of matter. The densest matter constitutes what we know as the physical plane, and includes the solid, liquid, gas, and ether of science, and also, we are told, matter still rarer than the ether known to science. The next, consisting of matter less dense than the rarest physical, is called the astral plane, and beyond that are what are called the mental, Buddhic, and Nirvanic planes, the matter in each being less dense than in the preceding one, so that the matter of the Nirvanic plane is far more subtle than anything we can conceive. The sixth and seventh planes we shall not need to refer to, as our present evolution is concerned only with the five lower. Just as in the physical plane we have matter of varying density, from solid to ether, so also each of the other planes can be subdivided, some of the matter of the plane being far more dense than other.

The first step in evolution is thus the preparation of the matter of the universe, changes in it taking place under the influence of the thought-vibrations of the Third Logos; just as, according to science, the first step in the evolution of a solar system is the condensation of various kinds of matter from the *comparatively* homoge-

neous substance of the nebula, until at last it reaches a sufficiently dense condition for organic life to begin to exist. Similarly, in the teachings of religion, the second step in evolution was the appearance of life, or, to express it more accurately, the building up of forms; for religion does not confine the term *life* to organised forms, as science sometimes does, but recognises that there is life also in the so-called dead matter of the mineral kingdom, nay, even in the minutest atoms of the chemical elements. We are told that it is the thought-energy of the Second Logos that builds forms, a significant fact when we remember that His characteristic is Love, which is universally recognised as a force that unites and binds together. The forms are built first in the subtler matter of the higher planes, the mere shadows or *ghosts* of forms, as it were, the archetypes of those that are to appear later on the lower planes. Little by little, denser and denser, matter is built into these shadowy forms by some of those intelligences already referred to as the agents in carrying out the purpose of God, until at length physical forms, as we know them, come into being.

We have an analogy to this building up of forms by vibration in the way in which sound will build forms. If some light dust, lycopodium for example, is sprinkled on a horizontal metal plate, supported so that it is free to vibrate, and a violin bow is then drawn across the edge, a musical note will be produced, of which the pitch depends on the thickness and quality of the plate, and the dust will be thrown up from the surface by the vibrations. When we ^{cease} drawing the bow, and the

note has died away, the dust will settle on the plate in definite geometrical figures, the form of which depends on the pitch of the note. Recently the dust has been photographed while in the air, and it has been found that it there forms solid figures to which the flat figures correspond, of which, in fact, they are the mathematical projection. The vibrations of sound are thus able to build forms in dense physical matter; by analogy, we shall therefore be prepared to find that the subtler thought-vibrations will build up forms in the subtler astral matter in which they act. As we have seen, Sir William Crookes has suggested the possibility of thought being a vibration, and some clairvoyants state that they have seen these thought-forms, and that they vary in character, in form, and colour according to the nature of the thought that produces them. They say, also, that the definiteness of outline and the permanence of the form depend on the intensity of the thought. A passing thought, which excites little interest in the mind of the thinker, sends out so feeble a vibration that it produces simply a loose, vague cloud of astral matter, slightly tinged with the colour appropriate to the thought; it disintegrates very rapidly, leaving apparently no trace behind. A thought, on the other hand, on which the mind of the thinker has dwelt with intensity and persistence, produces a form, clear and definite in its outline, and with a power of cohesion that causes it to persist for some considerable length of time. The vast majority of human thoughts are of the first class, but even they are able to build up an atmosphere, either pure or impure,

harmonious or the reverse, around the thinker, which can readily be perceived by anyone who is even a little sensitive to astral vibrations. So we can readily understand how the mighty thought of Vishnu, pulsing forth with the strong binding energy of Love, can build and sustain all the forms we see around us. For His thought is ever there, in every form, His love is ever poured forth, for He is the Sustainer, the Preserver of the universe. He is the Son, the embodiment of Love, of whom it is said that "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that hath been made."¹

The next stage in evolution is the development of consciousness in the forms thus built. The germ of consciousness is latent there, for they owe their very existence to the sustaining thought of the Logos, and the presence within them of a portion of His life; but it needs to be called out into activity. This is done by the aid of those Intelligences of whom we have already spoken as being the agents of God in carrying out His plan of evolution; and the energy employed is the same as before, the vibrations of thought. Up to this point we have considered only a single process, the effect of the vibration on the matter, differentiating it and building it into forms. Now we shall have to keep in mind the effect of the vibration on the matter of the form, and also on the life animating it.

The thoughts of these Intelligences, then, go out as strong waves of vibration, mighty in power, endless in variety, their rate and character varying according to the

¹ St John, i. 3.

exact nature of the thought. Acting first on the subtle matter, which is the natural medium of thought, they are reflected downwards from plane to plane until finally a responsive vibration is awakened in the matter of the lowest, the physical. Feeble at first, it becomes stronger as it is repeated, for there is in all matter a tendency to respond more readily to any vibration that has been repeated a number of times. So a definite *quality* is set up in the form ; for when we try to analyse what *qualities* really are, we find they may all be reduced to a tendency to vibrate in one way rather than in any other. And as different kinds of thoughts are sent through different subdivisions of any particular class of forms, there is a gradual differentiation amongst the forms, any class being subdivided into smaller and smaller classes as the process goes on.

At the same time, the response in the forms is communicated inwards, as it were, and awakens a response in the life that animates them. This is at first exceedingly feeble, for the life is at this stage less evolved than the form, but it also grows stronger with repetition, and, just as with the forms, qualities are set up in the life, and differentiation takes place there also. We can trace the development of life in the lower kingdoms of nature, for, taking this view of life, we see at once that there can be no such thing as *dead* matter. In the mineral kingdom, then, using that term in its broadest sense, life shows itself in various ways, such as chemical affinity and as the power of crystallisation. For when two or more substances combine with each other, forming a compound different

in characteristics from any one of the original constituents : or when one substance coming in contact with a compound attracts to itself one of the constituents, thus breaking up the original compound and forming a different one, what really happens is that one kind of matter responds to the vibrations of a certain other kind, even at the cost of freeing itself, so to speak, from some other set of vibrations with which it was already in accord. In crystallisation there is a still more definite selection of vibrations, for as crystals grow, the matter always arranges itself in definite geometrical forms, following certain lines called the axes of the crystal, which vary according to the particular kind of matter we are dealing with.

In the vegetable kingdom we see an advance in this evolution of life, or germinal consciousness, as any student of botany will at once recognise ; for the power of selection is in many cases quite distinctly marked. We need only to observe the devices in flowers to secure cross-fertilisation by attracting insects to them, the ingenuity by which only certain kinds of insects are admitted, so that the store of honey may not be needlessly wasted ; the devices for scattering the seeds when ripe, so that the young plants may not be crowded too closely together ; the shrinking of certain parts of sensitive plants when touched, or the closing of the leaves of certain plants when rain is approaching ; we need only observe these phenomena to be satisfied that there is something in plants which closely resembles what we call consciousness in animals and in man. We may

use the term instinct in the one case, consciousness in the other ; but when analysed they are found to be simply different degrees of the same thing, the power of selective response to vibrations. Or, to take a very well-known illustration : in every seed, when ripe, there is one portion of the embryo which is specialised to form the ascending axis, that is, the stem, leaves, etc. ; while the other portion is specialised to produce the root. If a large seed, such as a bean, be planted so that the embryo is inverted, the cell which is to form the root being nearer to the surface, the root will begin to grow upwards, but almost immediately it turns round and grows downwards ; the stem, similarly, begins to grow downwards, but very quickly turns and grows upwards. This shows a twofold action of consciousness. There is first a power analogous to what in an animal we should call sensation, which enables the root and the stem to feel that they are going in the wrong direction, probably the root feeling that it is approaching the light, the stem that it is going away from it ; and there is, secondly, a power analogous to what in an animal we should call the will, whereby both root and stem, apparently *of their own impulse*, change the direction of their growth.

In the animal kingdom the development of sensation is strongly marked ; the germs of memory and of desire are also apparent, though usually dependent on some external stimulus to arouse them. Even the germs of reason and conscience seem to be awaking in those of the animals that come in close contact with man, but we are told that this is because association with man tends

to accelerate, and even to "force" the lower evolution ; and that in the animals of the earlier stages, before man appeared on the earth, these qualities were not manifest.

The differentiation in the life which accompanies this development of consciousness, and which appears to have for its ultimate object the attainment of perfect self-consciousness, combined with the differentiation in the forms which has already been referred to, naturally gives rise to the subdivision into species, and finally leads to individualisation. Then it is that there takes place that third great step in evolution, described in *Genesis* as the breathing by God of the breath of life into the man that was made of the dust of the ground, whereby he became "a living soul"; the implanting of a germ of the divine life in the forms that had evolved through the lower kingdoms. Various symbols have been used to describe this ; it is a ray from the one central sun, a reflection, an image of God, the child of one Universal Father. But in all the symbols that have been used we recognise two great truths ; that *something*, coming direct from God, is added to the life that has been evolving upwards, thus forming the human individual, and that this something is of the very essence of God Himself, so that the addition, or union, renders possible a fuller evolution than would have taken place without it. It has sometimes been expressed by saying that the life in the lower kingdoms comes from the Second Logos, while that in man is from the First Logos. In whatever way it is expressed, one thing is certain, that there is in the human individual the potentiality of becoming divine, a perfect copy of

God, and that this potentiality is the special characteristic of humanity. Thus man himself has not evolved through the lower kingdoms, as believed by some, though the human *form* has done so. But he garners the harvest of that lower evolution; for he has the highly-evolved matter for his form, and he also gathers within himself, as it were, the sum total of the experiences of the life as it evolved upwards; the individualised lower life merging, so to speak, with the divine germ.

Up to this point the life was evolving, as a whole, within each species; now it is the individual that is evolving. And he begins his evolution with an inheritance from the lower kingdoms, consisting of the power of sensation fairly developed and the germs of memory and desire just beginning to grow. As in the earlier evolution, forms were ever disappearing to set the life free to pass to higher ones, so is it in the evolution of man. But it is now the life *as an individual* that passes from form to form, no longer the collective, un-individualised life of the species. Science recognises this in the definition sometimes given of instinct as the result of the experience of the species; while reason (the specially human characteristic) is defined as the result of the experience of the individual.

CHAPTER IV

REINCARNATION

WE must now trace the evolution of the human individual, who, as we have seen, is the very germ of God's own life, and therefore able to develop into a perfect copy of Himself. We shall first take the teaching, gathered from many religions, as to the way in which that evolution is going on *now*, and then later on in our study we shall be able to come back to the beginnings of humanity, and try to form some idea of what was going on then.

Now we are all familiar with the statement that we are not our body, that it is simply a garment which we are wearing for a time, or rather an instrument which we are using. We are sometimes tempted to wonder why we should be obliged to use such an instrument. So long as our life is bright, and everything prospers with us, we are quite contented with our body, and with all our physical surroundings, and we are not troubled by thoughts as to the difficult and perplexing problems of life. But life is not always bright, we are not always prosperous, and when things begin to go wrong with us, and all looks dark and desolate, then we begin to

wonder what we are living for ; it cannot surely be for our own pleasure, for at such times we feel there *is* no pleasure. So we wonder, and think, and puzzle ourselves over the meaning of life. Or it may be the sorrows of others that cause us to think thus. We see pain and misery all round ; we see some whose very existence seems to be one long torture, and we ask ourselves if, in the face of such misery, we can believe that the world is under the guidance of a wise and loving God. Happily for us, we are not left alone to wear out our energies over these perplexities ; for, as we have already seen, great teachers have come from time to time, and they have all taught us the same lesson. They have told us that all these joys and sorrows of life are sent to us for the sake of experience, they have shown us in their own lives what divine heights man is able to reach, and have told us how they themselves have reached those heights by the very same kind of experience as that through which we are passing now. More than that, they have assured us that we too shall reach the same point by making the best use we can of the experiences that come to us. But we feel so far beneath them that we still wonder how it will ever be possible for us to become so pure and noble as they are, for we feel that, even if we do our very best, still our life is so short that at its end we must still be very, very far beneath them. And then we find that they have given us another teaching which is full of comfort and hope. They have said to us, in effect if not in words : "Do not despair of reaching this high state ; do not let yourselves be over-

whelmed by the weight of your suffering and of your sin. This life, of which you think so much, is but one out of many; it is but like a day out of a year. Many are the lives you have already lived, many the lives that are yet to follow. Those that are past have given you experience which makes you what you are to-day; whatever you have of strength, and courage, and virtue you have gained during your past lives. Whatever of weakness and sin you feel in yourselves is but the result of your imperfect development. There are lessons you have not yet learned, and it is your ignorance of them that makes you weak and erring. But have courage; you are beginning to learn them now, and in the lives that are to come you will go on learning, until at last all weakness, and error, and sin will have gone, and you will be strong, and wise, and pure." Such is the substance of the teaching of Reincarnation which is found in the majority of religions, and is indeed believed by considerably more than half the human race. This teaching, handed down from the remotest antiquity, we will study in detail, so as to test its inherent reasonableness; for it is useless to take any teaching merely on the authority of others, however exalted they may be.

All of us will probably recognise that the experiences we gain during life tend to develop various qualities in us. Some of them increase our patience, our sympathy, our tenderness towards others, our truthfulness, our courage; in short, they intensify one or another of the different virtues we possess. Others, on the other hand, seem to intensify our faults, to render us more selfish,

more impatient, to make us rebellious and irritable, and in various ways to increase our weakness and add to our failings. Some of our experiences develop the intellectual faculties, others the artistic; from some we gain greater knowledge of the world, greater wisdom in dealing with the various problems we have at times to solve; and so in different ways our character and faculties change, either for the better or for the worse. But probably we all feel that the experiences of life give opportunity for only partial development. There are many virtues that are not yet so strong or so fully developed as we might wish; some, perhaps, that we have had very little opportunity of practising; many failings that we have not yet been able to overcome as thoroughly as we would desire; some, perhaps, that we have not yet begun to conquer, that are lying latent in us, and of the danger of which we are but dimly conscious. Some of our faculties we have been able to develop fully, others only partially; with regard to some, we feel an intense longing that we might have greater opportunities for study or practice, feeling that we could then attain far greater excellence; while many of us are conscious of possessing some faculties that we have had no opportunity of cultivating at all. We frequently come across cases of this kind; individuals, perhaps, in whom the love for music or for art amounts to a passion, who are keenly, and even critically appreciative of it, and who yet are so hampered by their environment that their whole time and energy have to be devoted to gaining a bare livelihood, and all the avenues of art are firmly closed against them.

Even with the most favourable circumstances we must all feel that death comes to us while our character is still far from complete, our faculties only partially developed, our knowledge still limited, and with much still remaining to be done before we shall have attained the goal of perfect humanity.

Again, we are continually forming ties with those whom we meet, contracting responsibilities by the influence we have on those around us. Some of these responsibilities we are able to discharge fully, we feel that we have done our whole duty with regard to them, and that they have passed out of our lives. But with regard to others, this is not so, and we often wish we had further opportunities in order to discharge our debts more completely. To take an illustration, it sometimes happens that one, by persuasion or example, leads another astray, encourages him in the practice of some idle or vicious habit, and thus brings trouble or even ruin upon him. He himself comes to realise the evil of the habit, and breaks himself off it, so that his own life becomes better and purer, and he has gained some degree of strength by the efforts he has had to make to overcome his failing. His wish now will be that he may be able to help his friend, whom he has led astray, to realise how harmful the habit is, and to make similar efforts to overcome it. But their lives have in the meantime drifted apart, and no opportunity comes to him of doing this. Or he may have the opportunity, but his friend will not listen to what he says, and so he is not able to undo the harm he has done. Thus he may pass out of

life with that injury unremedied, and with apparently no likelihood of his ever being able to remedy it. Or, to take an illustration of the opposite kind, one has sometimes been able to help another, has afforded him some opportunity that has changed the whole current of his life ; has brought under his notice some teaching, some truth, that has changed the tenor of his thought, leading him to greater knowledge and wisdom ; or has brought strength and comfort to him in some trouble or grief that has well-nigh overwhelmed him. One who has been thus helped feels deep gratitude and love towards his benefactor, and would fain show it by serving him in some way ; but opportunity is wanting, and his gratitude is limited to the feeling of love or reverence to the one who has helped. Many other illustrations might be quoted, but these will suffice to suggest the many ways in which we may feel, when death comes, that there are still many responsibilities undischarged, many debts unpaid.

Or, again, we recognise that during life our actions bring about certain results. Just as in physical nature we find that every cause has its appropriate effect, and that, if the cause is there, the effect must necessarily follow, so in our own lives we find that all our actions are causes which bring about certain results. Sometimes it is not easy to trace the connection between cause and effect, but, as a rule, we find that good actions lead to happiness both to ourselves and others, while wrong actions lead to suffering. But there are many apparent exceptions to this rule. Sometimes we see individuals

whose lives are honourable, full of unselfish consideration for others, marked by constant efforts towards all that is good and pure, and yet nothing but trouble pursues them; they are unsuccessful in all their undertakings, sorrow after sorrow falls upon them, and it would almost seem as if the whole world were against them. They do kindnesses to others, and give them help, but they are met with ingratitude and contempt, and receive injuries in return for their help. Others, on the other hand, live lives that are by no means honourable, act dishonestly and unkindly, are evil both in thought and in deed; and yet they are successful in everything, all their desires are gratified, and fortune smiles upon them from all sides. So here again our life appears to be incomplete, and when death comes there are causes created by ourselves which, so far as we can see, have not yet brought about their natural results.

These considerations have led many to believe that all that is thus left unfinished will be completed in some future stage of existence, which is by some thought to be a more ethereal and spiritual one than this, one in which we shall be freed from the many limitations of the present, and shall therefore be far better able to do all the good that we desire. But these ancient teachers of whom I have spoken say that this is not exactly true; that causes which have been set going in this world must bring about their effects here also, because the effects must be of the same nature as the causes, and it is only in the midst of similar surroundings that we can discharge the debts we have incurred; and this seems reasonable,

for in our ordinary experience we usually find that causes and effects are similar in their nature.

For this reason, we are told, we shall come back to this earth again to fulfil the responsibilities we have incurred. But there is first an intermediate stage of comparative rest; this we shall deal with in detail later on, but its general aim is the complete utilisation of the experiences of the past life. During life, experiences have been crowded one upon another, and we frequently feel that we are living in too much bustle and hurry to be able to trace out fully all the lessons we are learning. If we look back through the last few years of our life, we shall find there is a mass of experiences of various kinds, some of which we shall probably be unable to recall, while the rest will form such a heterogeneous mass that we shall not easily see what they were intended to teach. Some incidents, it is true, stand out prominently, and we can clearly understand their lesson, but there is much with regard to which we feel that we need more time to think it over, and more power of perception to be able to trace the chain of cause and effect running through it. It is somewhat as when we have taken up a new study; we may read for a considerable time, and gather a mass of information from our reading; but, in order for this to become real knowledge, we must from time to time put away our books, and spend our time thinking over what we have read, and seeking to apply it. Now after death we are living, we are told, in a subtler form than this physical body, and on it is impressed the memory of many of the experiences we have passed through. It

appears that events which affect mainly our physical life, having little, if any, effect on our emotions or thoughts, are impressed merely on the physical brain, and so after death they are lost to us. This is of no consequence, for such events have in themselves little, if any, influence on character. But sometimes a series of such events will lead up to a crisis in our life, and there the sum total, as it were, of these insignificant occurrences produces an important effect on our thought, and hence on character. This will be impressed not only on the physical brain, we are taught, but also on this subtler form, and so will persist after death. Some events, also, have in themselves a very important effect on us, as they influence not simply our physical life but our thoughts and emotions; and these will all leave their impress on the subtle form. Thus after death we shall still have all that is essential of our past life, and shall remember everything that affects our real selves. At the same time, being freed from the physical body, we shall no longer be distracted by fresh physical experiences, nor by the memory of merely physical events which has been with us as long as the physical brain existed. Thus we shall be able to deal with these subtler impressions far more successfully than during life, shall be better able to trace out their relationships one with another, shall see more clearly the chain of causes and effects, and shall thus be better able to learn all the lessons our past life has had to teach us. The learning of these lessons will render more keen our sense of right and wrong, and will continue the building up of those qualities and tendencies

of character which we began to develop during life ; these, being all a part of our *selves*, will remain with us always. Further, the results of our intellectual studies will be transformed into faculties ; much of the purely intellectual *knowledge* may perhaps be lost, but the *power of understanding* which results from study, and which belongs to the innermost self, can never be lost, and that remains in the form of faculty. Similarly all experiences that have stimulated the religious and spiritual nature will be transmuted into aspirations. But as at present, according to what we have been taught, it is this earth that is the scene for the gaining of experience, we shall not be able to gather experience of a totally new kind after death, so that the development of qualities, faculties, and aspiration, will be strictly limited to the activities of the life that has just closed, and will thus leave us still only partially developed, still imperfect, still in need of further experiences. And so when this process of the assimilation of past experiences is completed, we shall, by the infinite love and wisdom of God, be sent back again to earth to continue our development ; and, recognising our own incompleteness, we shall come back not only with content, but with joy at the prospect of having further opportunities for growth, and thereby of coming nearer and nearer to God.

Now all the conditions of our return will be according to what has been left unfinished in the preceding life. We have seen that we have a certain character, the result of our past lives. This will need a suitable form for its expression ; the quality and structure of the

brain will need to be such as will render possible the exercise of the intellectual faculties we possess, and also of the moral and spiritual qualities that have been developed. The law of heredity supplies the means by which this may be done; the individual, when ready to return to earth, being guided to those parents who can supply the suitable form; and hence we usually find that a child resembles one or both of its parents in its most marked qualities and faculties. It will be noted, however, that the resemblance is not due to transmission from the parents, and this is strictly in accordance with the most recent views of the law of heredity; for, according to Weismann and others, it is only physical qualities that are transmitted from parent to child, and not either intellectual or moral. But there are other requirements to be satisfied. Not only must the character already developed be able to express itself, but qualities and faculties at present latent need to be awakened to activity, and those that are partially developed need to continue their growth. We must remember that as the human individual is the germ of God's life, *all* divine qualities and faculties are latent in it. Thus an individual may be guided to a family where there is in one of the parents a strong development of some faculty not yet strongly active in itself; in order that it may receive a strong impulse towards its development by having a well-developed organ, and by the example and training of the parents. It seems likely that this will partly account for some of those exceptional cases, as when the child of a musical or

artistic genius possesses only very moderate faculty of the same kind as the parent; or when a child of a parent of high moral character has a tendency to some form of moral weakness, together with a desire to overcome it. But a more important factor in explaining these cases is that our environment and associations with other individuals need to be such as will bring us in contact with those to whom we owe some debt of responsibility, and will also give us the conditions of life that will furnish opportunity for experiencing the effects of causes we have set going in the past. And so a child sometimes appears in a family where he is totally unlike the other members, because he has some responsibility to one or more of them, or because he will there find the environment which he has earned for himself by his past actions. Reincarnation and heredity combined will thus give us a possible and likely explanation of both the rule and the exceptions which heredity by itself cannot do. Some, indeed, think that pre-natal influences afford a sufficient explanation of all that is not explained by heredity. But they are surely rather the means than the cause; for the question still remains unanswered as to *why* one particular soul rather than another should be brought into life with certain pre-natal influences.

The individual is now ready for the next stage in his long journey. He is provided with the body and environment which will best satisfy his various requirements; and is associated with others with whom he has some connection of responsibility, or from whom he can

receive the training and help he most needs. At first he will be somewhat hampered, because his body is, so to speak, a new instrument with which he has to work, and it does not yet readily respond to his touch. He is in somewhat the same position as a musician with a strange instrument; a violinist, for instance, who has for years played always on his own instrument, and is then, for some reason, compelled to lay it aside and take a strange one, is not able to pour forth so freely all the music that is in his soul; there is a certain restraint in his playing, and it is only when his new instrument has become attuned to him, and responsive to his touch, that he can show himself as the great musician he really is. Just so the individual, during the early childhood of his new body, can only imperfectly show forth his character, until at length the body becomes responsive. This explains why we often see what appears like an abnormally rapid development of faculty after the first few years of a child's life. It is not that his faculties have developed so suddenly as they appear to have done, but simply that his body has been rapidly becoming more responsive. He then passes on through his new life, learning fresh lessons, gaining new experiences, and so taking a few more steps forward in his long journey.

It will be seen that in the light of this teaching all sense of injustice, and even of inequality, must disappear. If our present conditions are difficult, if we seem to be surrounded by trouble, it is not because the providence of God has been less kind to us than to others, but because we ourselves have acted in such a way in past

lives as to produce these conditions, and to bring these troubles on ourselves. We have no one to blame for it all save ourselves. The providence of God is guiding us all through our long evolution ; but He guides simply by laying down the laws which will most perfectly govern our growth ; it is we who choose for ourselves whether we will walk in accordance with them, or will strive to run counter to them. If we choose the latter, then it is but a proof of His infinite love that His law brings us, perhaps in a subsequent life, into the suffering which will at length teach us to find our happiness in obedience. Since, therefore, we all make our conditions for ourselves, there can be no injustice. There does not appear even to be any real inequality, for it seems probable that we shall all need a very similar course of experience, shall, at least, all need to test every class of experience and environment. So our brother, who has now an unhappy environment, will appeal the more strongly to our sympathies, when we realise that we too have suffered similarly in the past, or shall perhaps suffer similarly in the future ; and we shall be less tempted to envy our more fortunate brother if we remember that happiness like his either has been or will be ours also. Even on those sad cases where there seems to be no opportunity for progress, light is thrown. For we know by experience that we often fail to appreciate the opportunities that are offered to us ; we neglect to use them, and it is not till they are gone beyond recall that we begin to realise what we have lost ; if then they were again to be given to us, we should appreciate them, and

use them far better than before. So we can understand that the lack of opportunity in the present incarnation may well be the result of having neglected our opportunities in the past. Now they are kept from us in order that we may learn their value ; that lesson once learned, they will again be placed in our way, and this time we shall fully utilise them. Thus without in any way conflicting with our belief in the over-ruling providence of God, this teaching supplies us with a reasonable explanation of what appears like injustice, or even cruelty, in the conditions into which so many of our unhappy fellow-creatures are born.

We have seen, also, how it works hand in hand with the law of heredity, and that it offers a possible and reasonable explanation of both the ordinary and exceptional cases. It accounts for the existence of genius, and of infant precocity, both of these being the outcome of a long course of training and practice in past lives, while the family in which the individual is born is determined either by the law of heredity or by some of the other factors that guide the return to earth-life. It explains the differences in members of the same family, as being the result of differences in their past evolution, while the fact that they are brought together into one family is due to their various mutual responsibilities or to their need for a similar environment.

These are among the most important problems to which the teaching of Reincarnation offers a reasonable solution, but there are many others that might be quoted. Indeed, the more one studies it, the more is one struck by its reasonableness and its applicability to all the

problems that arise, thus establishing its claim to be at least accepted as a more satisfactory working hypothesis than any other ; a claim which in a scientific theory would be regarded as very strong evidence of its truth.

Of the objections that are commonly brought against it, one of the strongest is that we do not remember our past lives, that there is therefore no proof that we have lived before, that the lack of memory must surely render our past lives useless, and that we cannot learn the lessons suffering has to teach us unless we know exactly for what mistakes or sins in the past we are suffering now. This objection has already been partly answered, for we have seen that nothing is really lost to us but the memory of the physical events of our past lives. All that is essential is remembered ; only it is remembered in the form of faculties and tendencies instead of events. But that is all that is of any importance. We can probably none of us remember all our efforts when learning to walk, all our slips and falls until we were able to hold ourselves steadily on our feet. Yet we should not be so foolish as to argue that therefore these efforts and slips were useless ! For all that is essential in them remains to us in the power to walk. Nor do we argue that, because we do not remember learning to walk, there is no proof that we ever did so. Rather the fact that we can walk now would be taken as a proof of our having learned in the past. Why should we not apply the same mode of reasoning to our past lives ? We see some children of six or seven years old, or even less, with a power of exercising faculties which most children have to acquire

slowly and painfully; some show a moral sense far in advance of that of other children of the same age, and yet sometimes the latter are in far more favourable surroundings and have a better heredity than the former. Is not the very possession of these faculties, or of this high moral sense, an indication of its being at least *probable* that they have been acquired in the past? As to the objection that we cannot learn the lesson that any suffering is sent to teach us, unless we know the causes in the past that have produced it, it seems on the surface to be a serious one. But we find, as we try to apply the teaching to our own lives, that it is not so serious as it appears; that the various classes of suffering do tend to develop certain definite qualities which we lack, even though we do not know the cause of the suffering; and in any case we have just the same difficulty without the theory of Reincarnation; for it is no easier to see what lesson is intended to be taught by suffering, if it is arbitrarily inflicted by the will of God, than if it is the result of unknown actions of our own in the past. So this will be at best only a negative objection. A deeper study of the nature of man and of his consciousness also shows us that there is probably what we might perhaps call a *sub-conscious consciousness* of the relation between the present and the past which enables us to learn the lesson, without knowing quite how we do it, in somewhat the same way that our bodies derive all the benefit from the processes of digestion, circulation of the blood, etc., without their making any impression on our brain consciousness. We are taught, even, that this relation is

impressed vividly on the soul, the real individual, immediately before its return to rebirth, that it sees in a flash the general outline of the lessons it has to learn in the coming life, and of the past events which have led to much of the suffering that is to come; and that after birth this knowledge remains with the individuality, though it is unable to impress it on the outer consciousness, owing to the limitations of the physical brain.¹

We have been told that we shall all ultimately reach a point in our evolution when certain of our faculties which are as yet dormant will be sufficiently developed for us to look back into our past lives; and, further, that there are a few who are already able to do this. But this argument will appeal only to those who *can* remember, and to those who come into personal contact with them, and are thus able to satisfy themselves of their reliability and soundness of judgment. By others it is likely at present to be received with a smile of incredulity, and we may therefore leave it on one side, and let the theory of Reincarnation rest on its own merits, its inherent reasonableness, and its power to explain the problems of life more satisfactorily than any other theory.

If it be true, then, it brings us hope and comfort such as few other teachings can bring. For it opens out to us a prospect of growth and progress wherein we shall have the opportunity to realise all our dearest hopes and ambitions. No trouble will be too heavy for us to bear, for we shall see in it the means whereby we may learn some needed lesson, and we shall know that so soon as

¹ See *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 193.

the lesson is learned, but no sooner, the trouble and suffering will pass away, and brighter days will dawn for us. At the same time, we shall become more and more conscious of our responsibility when we realise that every action of ours will bring its effect either in the present life or in a future one ; we shall know that no effort can ever be lost, and thus we shall have greater strength to strive even in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles, while we shall be the more careful to avoid all thoughtless, useless, and wrong actions, since they will but add to our difficulties in the future. Above all, we shall feel that in the light of this teaching our most sacred and reverent thoughts of God are firmly established, for we shall not only know, but also *understand*, that love and justice rule the world.

CHAPTER V

THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN

WE have so far mainly confined ourselves, in speaking of man, to a twofold division, regarding him as consisting of (1) the real self, which is the germ of the Divine Life, and (2) the body in and through which that germ is developing. In dealing with Reincarnation we saw that we are told also of the existence of a subtler form which persists after the death of the physical body. We must now take up the constitution of man in greater detail, else we shall not be able to understand the more exact teachings that have been given to us regarding the life after death.

We have seen that the whole universe is the expression or manifestation of the life of God; that His thought, going forth in mighty vibrations, brings into being all the different kinds of matter that constitute the seven planes of the universe; that it then builds up forms of manifold variety on each of these planes, in every one of which there is latent a part, so to speak, of God's own life, which causes the form to exist, and the development of which causes the evolution of consciousness in

its various aspects, each aspect being a partial manifestation of the life. We have also seen that man is the very seed of God Himself, having thus in himself a more complete potentiality of evolution than any lower form, being able, indeed, ultimately to evolve into a perfect copy, or image of God; and that man's evolution is brought about by means of vibrations from without, that is, experiences which awaken a response in the form and also in the life, thus bringing into activity one by one all the powers of consciousness latent within him. Now it follows from this that, in order to attain his full evolution, man must be acted on by influences on *every* plane of the universe, and must be able to function on every plane; in other words, he must be able to respond to all the classes of vibration that are the outer manifestation of the thought of God, and must be able ultimately to initiate similar vibrations himself. One is at first almost overpowered by the thought of what this means; it opens out before us such an endless vista of progress, and one feels more than ever satisfied of the absolute necessity for a long series of incarnations in order to attain the goal placed before us.

Now, science has shown us that some classes of vibration require for their transmission media of different density from those required by other classes; in other words, that one kind of matter may be susceptible to certain sets of vibration and to no other. If an electric bell be placed under the glass receiver of an air-pump, and be set ringing, we shall be able, before any of the air is exhausted, both to see the vibration of the bell and to

hear the sound. If, then, the air be gradually exhausted, we shall see that the vibration is in no way changed, but the sound will grow fainter and fainter, until at last it becomes inaudible. Sound requires a denser medium for its transmission than light, as we have already seen, so neither the ether, nor the exceedingly attenuated air, that still remain in the receiver, can convey the vibrations of sound to us, though they are quite sufficient for the light-vibrations. Add to these considerations the teaching that it is *through the form* that man is susceptible to influences from without, and then it will readily be seen that in order to acquire the power of functioning on every plane, that is, in order to evolve his consciousness in its entirety, he must have a form composed of the matter of each plane, through which he may receive the vibrations peculiar to it. This, we are told, is true. Not only has he a physical body, whereby he gathers experience on the physical plane, but he has also an astral body, a body that is composed of astral matter, whereby he can come in contact with the astral plane; a body composed of matter of the mental plane, and still subtler bodies composed of matter of the higher planes. But we must not think of these bodies as entirely separate one from another, and occupying entirely different localities. They interpenetrate one another in somewhat the same way that if a piece of soft wood be placed in a vessel of water, the water will interpenetrate the wood; or, in the same way, that science tells us every form of matter is interpenetrated with ether. Thus, wherever our physical body is, there also, under ordinary circum-

stances, are our astral and mental bodies. We cannot see them owing to the limitations of our consciousness when working in form. If we are examining an object under a microscope, we need to adjust the instrument according to the particular part of the object we wish to examine; if it is focussed so that one part of the object can be seen clearly, then certain other parts will not be able to be examined, as they will be out of focus, so that *all* the parts cannot be seen at the same time. Sometime we must even change our lens; the larger parts will need a lens of lower power than the minute portions, so that the lens which is suitable for examining certain parts will be quite useless for others. It is somewhat the same with our consciousness. As a microscope may be provided with several lenses, each suited for a different class of objects, so our consciousness is provided with several sets of senses, suitable for the different planes of matter; and that set of senses with which we can see matter of one plane is quite useless for matter of another plane. Also, even with regard to the matter of a single plane, the senses need to be focussed, so to speak, according to the variety of matter we want to perceive. So when we are using the senses by which we can see the physical body, the astral and other subtle bodies are invisible to us; while to the senses with which we could perceive the astral body, the physical body would be invisible. Most of us can at present use only the senses suitable for physical matter; but a few have also learned how to use other senses, and thus can perceive the other bodies, and we shall all ultimately be able to do so. We shall not

need to study any of the bodies except those composed of the matter of the three lower planes, as those are the only ones that have yet evolved to any considerable extent; so our evolution will be confined to them for some time to come.

The physical body is the one with which we are best acquainted; indeed, it is the only one that is yet recognised at all by the majority of people. It contains various organs, some of which have for their function the maintaining of the vitality of the body; others, the organs of sensation, serve to receive vibrations from the outer world, which are then transmitted along the nerves to various nerve-centres, most of which are situated in the brain, where, according to physiological science, the vibrations are transmuted into sensations. Impulses are also sent out from these nerve-centres which produce movements of different parts of the body; motion being in some cases the result of the outer impulse without any conscious action on our part, in other cases the result of the prompting of that aspect of consciousness which we call the will. As to *how* the subtle promptings of thought and will give rise to motion, or as to *how* the physical vibrations received by the sense-organs are transmuted into sensation, physiological science is unable to speak. It is a question that cannot be easily answered in detail, and the teachings we are considering assert that it is due to an action in the subtler bodies aroused by the vibrations which impinge on the physical body. The latter then becomes nothing more than a vehicle of communication between the outer world and the

consciousness of man, with no power of sensation, or indeed of any form of consciousness *in itself*, apart from the subtler bodies. We are told that the physical body, as known to physiological science, is composed only of the denser parts of the physical plane, the solid, liquid, and gaseous matter. It is therefore sometimes called the *dense body*, to distinguish it from another form, which is composed of the subtler kinds of physical matter, the different classes of ether that have been already referred to. On account of its constitution this form is called the Etheric Double. It is the exact copy of the dense body, for it consists simply of the etheric matter which permeates it, surrounding each particle, so that "no particle of physical matter is in contact with any other particle, but each swings in a field of ether."¹

Thus each part of the dense body has its etheric counterpart; the etheric matter permeating the dense matter of the hand may be called the etheric hand; the etheric matter permeating the dense matter of the eye may be called the etheric eye; and so on with every part of the body. It is, of course, invisible to us, as our senses are not yet sufficiently keen to perceive etheric matter. Its special function is to form the channel by which vitality is distributed through the dense body. All physical vitality comes to us from the sun. We know what a vitalising effect the sun's rays have on all kinds of vegetation, and also on animals; and how, in many cases of sickness, sunshine is the best cure. This is not surprising if, as some religions teach, the sun acts as a kind of

¹ *Man and his Bodies*, A. Besant, p. 27.

lens, gathering and focussing the life-energies of the Logos in physical matter, and directing them to the earth. The etheric double receives this life energy; in other words, the etheric matter of the physical body vibrates in response to these vibrations from the sun, and so distributes them through the body. It also forms an intermediate link between the dense body and the astral body, transmitting the vibrations from the one to the other, and so helping to connect the consciousness with its densest vehicle. The vibrations that are received by the dense body are accompanied by corresponding vibrations in the etheric matter, and these are passed on to the astral body, whence they reach the consciousness. Similarly the vibrations connected with the action of the will pass from the astral body to the etheric matter and thence to the physical organs. The etheric double is not yet sufficiently developed to receive the etheric vibrations independently of the dense body, and pass them inwards directly to the consciousness. In a few individuals this does take place, and we then have the lowest and commonest form of clairvoyance, the power of seeing the etheric doubles of physical objects, and other etheric forms.¹

As the etheric double is the vehicle for physical vitality it is evidently necessary for life that the connection between it and the dense body should remain unbroken. Hence under normal conditions it does not separate itself from the dense body. At times, however, it may do so, but it never goes far away from it, and it still remains con-

¹ See *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 68.

nected with it by a cord or thread of etheric matter through which the vital currents continue to pass. Were this to be snapped, death must ensue; and even when the etheric double separates itself from the dense body for a short distance, the vitality of the latter is very much lowered, and the consciousness is very partial and dull. It takes place sometimes in cases of ill-health, and instances are known where a clairvoyant has at the same time seen both the dense body of one in weak health and the etheric double at a short distance away. In some phenomena connected with spiritualism, also, the etheric double of the medium separates from the dense body; and when forms are seen and recognised by the sitters as their own departed relatives, they are sometimes only the etheric double of the medium shaped into the likeness of the departed by the strong thought and desire of the sitters. In these cases the vitality of the medium is very much lowered, which is one reason why there is so much danger connected with spiritualistic phenomena. A third case where the etheric double may be separated from the dense body is under the influence of anæsthetics. It is then partially or wholly extruded, and on the extent to which this takes place depends the depth of the anæsthesia induced. For being the first of the links between the dense body and the consciousness, there can be no sensation if the communication between itself and the dense body be temporarily stopped. In cases of complete anæsthesia the communication is apparently completely stopped. But sometimes the anæsthesia is only partial, and then

there are all the signs of sensation, shrinking from the surgeon's knife, cries of pain, and yet when consciousness returns after the operation there is no memory of pain. This is sometimes said to be due to an automatic action of the nerve-centres, the impulse of sensation reaching them, and being there translated into an impulse of motion without the consciousness being affected. It is possible that in these cases the etheric double is only partially extruded, so that there is still partial communication ; if this is so, the impulse of sensation may actually reach the consciousness, and be there transmuted into the impulse of motion in the ordinary way, but the impression left is not sufficiently deep to remain for any length of time, and there is thus no memory. The truth is, we know very little yet as to the action of the consciousness, whether we study the question from the physiological or from the occult stand-point ; but with the development of the senses of the subtler bodies we shall gain more knowledge.

The activity or life which expresses itself through the dense body and etheric double is usually spoken of as Prâna. There is but one life throughout the universe, the life of Ishvara, but it manifests itself in various ways according to the kind of matter in which it is functioning, in somewhat the same way that the various forms of energy are all vibrations, but differ as to their action, and sometimes as to the kind of matter in which they can act. The life of man is an individualised portion of the life of the universe, and thus it also will manifest itself in different ways according to the kind of matter,

that is, according to the body in which it is working. So we find that in Theosophical literature man is spoken of as having various "principles"; but we must remember that these are only the different *activities* of the life, which is itself one. So we shall have to consider not only the various forms or bodies of man, but also the various kinds of activity of the life or consciousness working in these forms. The lowest of the "principles," therefore, is Prâna, or physical vitality, and the form in which it functions is the physical body, consisting of its two parts, the dense body and the etheric double.

The next body is formed of astral matter, and hence is called the astral body. It is subtler than the etheric double, but, like it, is similar in form to the dense body, and interpenetrates it. It has centres of sense corresponding to those of the physical body, and very closely related with them, for it is the special vehicle of sensation. The vibrations from outside impinge on the sense-organs of the dense body, which vibrate in response; this, as we have seen, causes a responsive vibration in the corresponding etheric matter, which in its turn awakens a further response in the corresponding astral centres. The astral vibrations are thence transmitted to the life or consciousness, and this particular activity is called sensation. The possibility of the transmission of a vibration from the matter of one plane to that of another depends on the fact that the coarsest matter of one plane enters into the composition of the finest matter of the plane below. Thus there is a constant interplay amongst the different planes of matter and amongst the different bodies of man.

In the majority of individuals the function of these sense-centres is limited to the passing onwards to the consciousness of the vibrations received by the physical body; but in those who are more advanced, the sense-centres become more highly developed, and acquire the power of receiving vibrations direct from the astral plane, and passing them to the consciousness without any activity of the physical centres. They then become the instruments of the true astral consciousness, and we have the second stage of clairvoyance, astral as distinguished from etheric. The sense-centres then present an appearance of great activity; those who have seen them say they look something like vortices of energy, or like whirling "wheels of fire."¹

Not only is the astral body the vehicle of sensation, but it is also the vehicle of desire and emotion, desire being the result of the memory of sensation, emotion the result of the action of the mind on sensation. It is therefore sometimes called the *desire-body*. Impulses to action are also transmitted to the physical organs through it. Each of our bodies has this twofold function, to serve as a link of communication between the consciousness and the lower bodies, and also to fulfil its function in the plane from which its own matter is drawn. The latter can be fully done only when the body is well developed and organised, and only then can we gather experience *directly* from the plane; thus, since with the majority of people the physical body is the only one that is well developed,

See *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 96, 101.

this is an additional reason why it is necessary to return, time after time, to physical life.

The astral body, unlike the etheric double, is easily separated from the physical, and can travel even to great distances from it. At such times the physical body will be asleep or unconscious, as the individual himself will be away from it in the astral body. It will be like a house that is left empty for a time during the absence of its owner; but there is a certain connection, possibly a magnetic link, between the two bodies, so that if any danger should threaten the physical body, or if any strong or violent sensation should be produced in it, a message would, so to speak, be instantly sent to its owner and he would immediately return. This separation takes place whenever we sleep, and is the real cause of what we call the unconsciousness of sleep. It is not really unconsciousness, except in the case of those whose astral bodies are too undeveloped for them to receive any impressions from the astral plane. We have seen that in many individuals there is very little development of the true astral sense-centres, and so there will be very little consciousness during sleep. There may be chaotic dreams, and these are due to the fact that the astral body is not then entirely separated from the physical, and also to the tendency of the physical brain to repeat automatically the vibrations that have been impressed on it during the day; these are then passed upwards through the astral body to the consciousness. But if the astral sense-centres are beginning to develop more

highly, the man will be able to be conscious to a certain extent on the astral plane; he will receive vibrations from it with greater or less vividness and accuracy according to his development, and so *he* will be conscious, though his physical body is unconscious. Of this consciousness he will in most cases retain no memory, because at the time the astral body is separated from the physical; but at an advanced stage of development he acquires the faculty of handing on the consciousness experienced through the astral body during sleep to the physical brain, and then there is clear memory. Even in undeveloped persons this will take place occasionally, for the faculty is present in all, though latent, and may be abnormally stirred to activity on special occasions. We then have instances of visions, clear vivid prophetic dreams, and similar phenomena. In cases of trance, as well as of sleep, the real man is absent in his astral body, and more or less conscious in it according to his development.

The activity of the consciousness corresponding to the astral body is called Kâma. It may be translated as desire, but it includes more than what we usually understand by desire. Indeed, it is the most important of the activities of most men at present; for their thoughts are very largely tinged by desire, and the sensations also are both the cause and the result of desire. The astral body will therefore be greatly affected by our thoughts, and indeed its character will depend mainly on the nature of those we most often think. Just as in the earlier stages of evolution the waves

of thought sent through matter by the Intelligences who were guiding evolution first built up forms, and then brought out certain marked characteristics in them through the tendency in matter to reproduce automatically the classes of vibration that have been responded to the most frequently ; so are we continually building up our astral bodies by our thoughts, and impressing on them certain marked characteristics according to the vibrations that are most frequently sent through them. In this way habits of desire and thought are formed ; and while this susceptibility of the body to thought may be a great hindrance to us as long as we indulge in undesirable thoughts and impure or worldly desires, it becomes of the greatest assistance to us when we deliberately set to work to purify ourselves. But we shall consider this point in greater detail when we come to deal with the nature and power of thought.

So far our knowledge may be supposed to be fairly definite and accurate, and capable of being tested ; for astral faculties are already developing in a considerable number of people, so that what one observes can be tested comparatively easily by the observations of others. But when we come to speak of the subtler bodies, we enter what is to most the realm of speculation, or at least of tentative hypotheses ; for there are as yet but very few in whom the faculties are active by which these bodies can be perceived. And the various religions tell us but little on the matter. The following teaching with regard to them is what will be found most generally in

the Theosophical literature.¹ There are two bodies into the composition of which the matter of the third plane enters, the mental and the causal. The former is composed of the denser matter of the plane, that belonging to the four lower subdivisions, sometimes called the "*rupa*, or 'form' levels," that is, the subdivisions of which the matter is built into form as we know it. This body is not of the same form as the physical body, but is spheroidal or egg-shaped, and, like the astral body, extends to some little distance beyond the physical, interpenetrating and enclosing it. But its size varies according to the development of the individual; in an undeveloped person it is small, indistinct, and very slightly developed; but it grows in size with the intellectual progress of the individual. For it is the special vehicle of *thought*, the working of the intellect first producing vibrations in this kind of matter. In the early stages of growth it has no organisation, the matter of which it is composed being very fine and subtle, but unorganised, and only very dully responsive to the vibrations that reach it. It is, of course, invisible at all times to ordinary sight, however highly developed it may be, but in this undeveloped state it cannot easily be seen even by that "inner vision" which is able to perceive the matter of the third plane. As the individual is so little developed, he has not yet gained much power of thought, and thus very few, if any, vibrations are originated in the mind-body. But we have seen that the vibrations on one plane awaken a response in the matter of the next plane,

¹ See especially *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 156-178.

and have traced the way in which physical vibrations are transmitted through the etheric double to the astral body, and thus give rise to sensations. These vibrations in the astral body are also passed on to the mental body, which responds to them, at first very feebly, but gradually more strongly as the matter, being constantly worked upon, becomes more responsive. A response is then awakened in the consciousness of the man himself, and as the impressions made on the mental body are more lasting than those on the astral, the mental body very soon begins to reproduce these vibrations of its own accord, without the stimulus from the lower bodies. Then growth becomes far more rapid, for memory and imagination begin to act, and the man little by little acquires the power of not merely *feeling*, but of analysing and criticising his feelings, and then of reasoning about them, and drawing all manner of deductions from his perceptions. Thus the intelligence grows, and with it the mental body also grows and develops until it becomes a luminous sphere, extending for some distance around the physical body, radiant with colour, constantly vibrating in immediate and vigorous response to the impulses that reach it from without, and also beginning to originate vibrations itself and thus stimulate the astral body to activity from within. Desire then becomes more active and strong than before the development of the mental body, action begins to be the result of deliberate resolve, not merely of outer impulse, and reason and intelligence clearly manifest themselves. Still the mental body is unable to respond directly to vibrations in mental matter, and thus

the man is not able to perceive either the matter or the life of the third plane. At an advanced stage, however, this power is also acquired, and then the whole mental plane is opened up to the consciousness. The mental body also becomes responsive to vibrations from the higher planes, and then the man is able to express not only the thoughts that are in the first instance prompted by the outer world, but also those that come to him from above; we then have flashes of inspiration and of genius; the aspirations of the true human self become more and more definite, constant, and strong, and the outer world begins to lose its attractiveness as he becomes more and more conscious of these impressions from the higher worlds. But such development as this becomes possible only by means of constant training and study, concentration of mind, development of the intellectual faculties, control of the desires, and cultivation of the higher emotions.

The second body that is formed of the matter of the third plane is called the causal body. It is formed of the finest matter of the plane, belonging to the higher subdivisions which are sometimes known as the "arupa (formless) levels," because the forms there are so much less rigid, so much less definite than those on the lower planes, that from these planes we should hardly recognise them as forms at all. This body, though similar in form to the mental body, is far more beautiful and radiant; but in the majority of people it is as yet very little developed. It is able to respond only to the vibrations that are produced by pure, noble, unselfish thoughts, by

aspiration, and by highly intellectual abstract thought. Thus its growth is at present very slow. It differs from the other bodies, as we shall see presently in that it persists through the whole cycle of incarnations through which we are passing; it thus becomes the storehouse for the lessons that we learn through our experiences in the outer world.

The activity of the consciousness corresponding to these two bodies is called Manas, intelligence, thought. It has two aspects corresponding to the two bodies, which may be described as concrete thought, working in the mental body, and abstract thought, working in the causal body. At present we usually think by means of concrete thought, that is, our thought takes form as a series of mental images. For instance, if we think of a triangle we at once find in our minds a mental image of a three-sided figure, which we actually *see* mentally; or we may see a number of three-sided figures of different shapes and sizes, all suggested by the thought of a triangle. This is concrete thought. But there are two common properties possessed by *all* the triangles, whatever their size and shape; they are all formed by three lines on the same plane, and the three angles of each one are together equal to two right angles. Now, if we could blot out of our minds all the mental images of triangles that we find there, and yet hold on clearly and firmly to the idea of these two common properties, we should then be thinking by means of abstract thought.¹ We cannot do it yet, because the causal body is not sufficiently developed, and also because of the limitations of the physical brain;

¹ See *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 144.

as soon as we let go the mental images, the definiteness of our thought is gone ; as soon as we bring back the definiteness of thought, the mental images are there again. Even if we think of some very abstract idea we find it is generally associated with some mental image, subtle though it may be ; for instance, if we think of some virtue, we do not form any very clear conception of it unless we associate with it the thought of some manifestation of that virtue either in an action or in a person, and if we analyse this we shall find it reduces itself finally to a mental image, or a series of such images. Concrete thought is called Lower Manas, abstract thought Higher Manas. They are really two methods of the one activity, the former working in form, the latter beyond form as we know it.

There is still another body called sometimes the bliss-body, sometimes the Buddhic body, formed of the matter of the fourth plane. Of this body we can say very little, for it has hardly begun to be formed in the majority of individuals. But its special characteristic is that when it is formed, and the consciousness begins to be active in it, we lose the sense of separateness from all other individuals, and begin to understand what is meant when it is said in some religions that there is unity underlying all manifestation. We shall then be able to feel exactly what others are feeling when we come in contact with them ; when we want to help another we shall know exactly what his difficulty is, and in what way he needs help ; misunderstanding will become an impossibility, for sympathy will be perfect. But it is useless to try to describe this, for it is as yet beyond us,

However, we are approaching this development, and we occasionally have a very faint foretaste of it, when we are in the company of some very close friend with whom our sympathy is so great that the thought passes from mind to mind, and we feel there is no need for words, for we understand each other equally well without. In such a case we sometimes say that the two souls are one, and it is true ; but we shall learn, as we grow, that not only is it true of *two* souls, but that it is true of *all*. Then, indeed, shall we be able to realise the brotherhood of man in a way that we cannot do yet, and then too shall we begin to gain some faint conception of the nature of God, for His very essence is unity. This activity of the consciousness is called Buddhi, while the term Átma is applied to the consciousness itself, apart from all thought of the ways in which it manifests itself in form.

Summing up the results of our study, then, we find that there are five aspects of consciousness in man, and five forms corresponding to them. The consciousness itself, Átma, is one ; but it manifests itself as Buddhi, or the consciousness of unity, through the bliss-body ; as Higher Manas, or abstract thought, through the causal body ; as Lower Manas, or concrete thought, through the mental body ; as Kâma, or desire, through the astral body ; and as Prâna, or vitality, through the etheric double ; while the dense body has no special form of activity peculiar to itself, but is the instrument whereby the consciousness is able to come into touch with the physical plane, and so gather the experiences which are at present its only means of development.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERY OF DEATH

At all times there has been an instinctive desire in man to know that his conscious individual existence shall not end with the death of the body, but that he shall still continue to live, retaining his identity without any break. But there has at the same time been a deep mystery gathered about death. Man comes into existence on this earth, but none can say whence he has come; he passes out of life, and none can say whither he has gone. An old Norwegian saga describes how, when the king was sitting feasting with his nobles, a little bird flew in at one of the windows, and after fluttering through the hall flew out on the other side, disappearing into the darkness. Even like the flight of that little bird, said the king's bard, was the life of man, unknown in its beginning, unknown in its ending, known only in a tiny fraction of the whole, in this swift passage through earth, which alone is open to our perceptions.

Some have even thought that there is something of irreverence, almost of impiety, in seeking to fathom this mystery; that God has veiled the knowledge from us,

and that we should not seek to know that which He, in His wisdom, has hidden from us. Those, however, who believe that man is divine, think otherwise, for they know that it is not God who conceals knowledge from us, but our own limitation and lack of development that prevents us from seeing the truths which He is ever unfolding before us. So they seek to learn from those who are less limited, because more developed, than themselves; and they find that the sages of the past have thrown some light on this problem; they have told us that there is life on the other side of the grave, and have given us some pictures of what that life is. They have also told us what we must do in order to be able to test their statements for ourselves. They have marked out for us a certain course of training and discipline which will ultimately develop in us powers and faculties by which we can come into actual contact with the conditions of life which prevail after death. So we have more than mere second-hand evidence; we are not compelled to depend solely on the evidence of others; we can ourselves test the accuracy of their statements if we will take the trouble to follow the course of discipline they have marked out. This, however, is by no means an easy task, nor one that can be quickly accomplished; so we shall do wisely if in the meantime we take the teachings on the subject which have been given by them, and may be traced in various religions.

We have seen that man is not to be identified with his body; that he himself is a germ of the Divine life, which is evolving by means of experience gained through

the body ; and that he therefore has more than one body or form, and gains experience on each of the planes of our solar system through the form composed of the matter of that plane ; and that his consciousness has different aspects according to the form through which it is working. We have seen also that, during the life of the body, man is gathering experience on the physical plane, by means of which he develops certain characteristics ; but that his character is not fully developed during a single life. We have classified the activities of his consciousness, and have found that they are, roughly speaking, fourfold, consisting of sensation, emotion, intelligence, and aspiration. A strong element of desire enters into all these activities, but especially into the first two. We shall find that after death our life is regulated by the relative intensity of these four, so if we examine our own lives and characters we shall be able to know fairly well what will be our state after death.

Now, death in itself is nothing more than the casting aside of a body that is no longer wanted ; just as we would cast aside a suit of clothes that was worn out. In most cases of death the body is worn out, either by old age alone, or by disease, or by some sudden or violent injury. In the case of those who live to a ripe old age, it is comparatively easy to understand why death should come, for they have had ample opportunities of gaining experience, and for further progress a change of environment may well be necessary. There is also another consideration. Our character grows during our life, but the body, being of very dense and rigid materials,

does not keep pace with the growth of character. It is true that the body does change ; it becomes more refined if our character grows in refinement ; the organs of the brain develop as the faculties to which they correspond are cultivated ; but the improvement of the body with most men is not so rapid as that of the character, and so, though when we were young our bodies may have expressed our character fairly accurately, when we are old they will not do so to as great an extent, and will thus become a hindrance to us. In the case of those who die young, it is not so easy to understand ; because it seems as if they cannot yet have utilised more than a small proportion of the opportunities their life would have afforded ; and the life-forces of their body are still by no means exhausted. But as we study Reincarnation more and more deeply, we learn how complicated are the causes of all the events of our life, and we begin to understand more clearly how an incarnation may be suited for the working out of the effects of a very limited chain of causes, and when that has been done, a complete change of environment and of body is necessary. Or, in some cases, the very fact of dying young probably has an important lesson to teach. In all cases we see more and more clearly, as our knowledge increases, that death is no cause for regret, that it is simply the means whereby we put off a body that is of no more use to us, or escape from an environment that is no longer suitable.

When a man dies, then, he simply goes out of his body, withdrawing himself in the etheric double. As he does this, the cord connecting the etheric double with

the dense body is snapped, and thus there is no means for Prâna, the vital energy, to reach the dense body and be distributed through it ; disintegration or decay, therefore, quickly sets in, for Prâna is the organising force that holds together and controls all the cells of the body. Very shortly afterwards he withdraws from the etheric double into the astral body, and the etheric double also begins to disintegrate, his Prâna returning to the ocean of universal life. It is said that at the moment of death he sees, in a series of vivid visions, as it were, all the chief scenes of his past life, but with an understanding of them that he did not have as they occurred, seeing the causes that brought them about, the results that will naturally follow from them, and the lessons they were intended to teach him. This is an experience of the greatest value to him, as it enables him to utilise the experiences of the past life far more than he would otherwise do. So those who are with one who is dying should keep themselves quiet and still, not allowing their grief at parting from one they love to cause any disturbance around him, but by their own self-control and calmness making it easier for him to take full advantage of this solemn review.¹

The individual himself is in no way changed by leaving the body ; his character still remains the same, he has the same desires, the same emotions, the same intellectual powers, the same aspirations ; he still feels the same affection and friendship for those he has loved, for these feelings belong to himself and not to his body.

¹ See *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 109-111.

He continues to live, then, just as before ; but he has now only the astral, mental, and causal bodies. The astral, being the densest of these, is the vehicle or instrument which he chiefly uses for the first part of the time after death. While he was living in the physical body, he was limited by that, imprisoned in it, and could come into direct touch only with the physical plane. Now he is limited by the astral body, imprisoned in it, and can come into touch only with the astral plane. But we have seen that with the majority of people the astral body is not sufficiently developed to serve as an independent vehicle of consciousness, and thus he is not able to gather any entirely new experiences ; he will be conscious only of those things on the astral plane, of which he has known the denser counterpart on the physical plane, and will be susceptible only to those vibrations which he has experienced during his past life. He will thus be as if imprisoned within himself ; his own sensations and emotions being confined to those connected with the experiences and desires of the past life ; the outer world being to him the reproduction of all the objects and surroundings that he has either perceived or imagined during life, differing from the physical objects and surroundings only so far as the greater subtlety and luminosity of astral matter makes them more beautiful and refined.

As the astral body is the special vehicle of sensation, emotion, and desire, he will for the present live entirely in his desires, and this is likely to be a cause of suffering. For, if we examine our desires, we find that some of them

are directed to objects that belong only to the physical plane. Some men find their greatest pleasure in the possession of wealth, of the various objects of ease and luxury; some find their pleasure in eating and drinking, others in the indulgence of the various forms of sensuality; and the more these desires have been gratified during life the stronger they will have grown. The mere fact of dying will not in any way have affected the desires, they will be just as strong as before; but the means of gratifying them will no longer be present. Suppose, for example, that a man while living has greatly enjoyed the pleasures of the table, and strongly desired them if they were out of his reach, he will then continue to desire them after he has left his physical body. But it is only by means of the physical body that we can either eat or drink, and as he no longer has his body, he feels the craving, but has no means of gratifying it. This will cause suffering, the acuteness of which will depend on the intensity of the desire. For if we analyse our sufferings, we shall find that they are all due to *some* form of ungratified desire; though not necessarily a degraded, impure, or worldly desire. Thus the suffering of the life after death will arise entirely from ourselves; not imposed on us by some being or some power outside of ourselves, but simply the result of our own thoughts and desires. One most important lesson is impressed on the individual by this experience. He begins to realise, as he never could have done to so great an extent in his physical life, that all desires which require physical objects and surroundings for their gratification give very

transient pleasure, and that they become a source of pain except for the very short time that he is living in a physical body ; they are therefore not worth cherishing ; and thus he begins to wish to overcome them. He will then, on his return to earth-life, bring with him the consciousness that purely material pleasures are not worthy objects of desire ; it may be a very dim consciousness at first, and he will not know exactly how he has learned the lesson ; nor will he have lost the desires, for they can be conquered only in the surroundings where the possibility of their gratification exists. But he will recognise, however dimly, that he ought to overcome them, and this will be the first step towards actually doing so. This purificatory suffering after death is not a lasting state. For during life a certain amount of energy has, so to speak, been accumulated by the gratification of the desires, and this will gradually exhaust itself in the struggle for continued gratification. If we exert a physical force on any body for a given length of time, we shall produce a certain amount of energy in the body, which will remain after the force has ceased to act ; for instance, if we push a ball along the ground for some distance there will be an accumulation of energy proportionate to the strength of the force and the length of time during which it has been exerted. If, then, we leave off pushing, it will continue to move for some time, until the energy that is stored up has expended itself in overcoming resistance. It is similar with our desires ; they will continue active after death until the energy we have stored in them during life is expended ; then they will

cease to act, they will fall asleep as it were, but the desire itself will remain as a potentiality, a germ, and will awake to activity again in the next earth-life, when the presence of the objects of desire supplies a stimulus from without.

It depends then on ourselves whether we shall suffer after death or not. If our desires for worldly pleasures are strong, and we continually yield to the temptation of gratifying them, we are then preparing for ourselves a time of keen suffering after death, from which nothing can save us. Those who have developed those higher faculties by which they can come in actual touch with those who have died, and can know exactly what they are experiencing, tell us that we can have little conception here how great the suffering sometimes is; for the play of feeling in the astral body when disjoined from the physical is so much stronger, the energy of the sensations and emotions having to cause vibrations only in the light astral matter instead of having to move the physical matter as well. They say, indeed, that it well-nigh breaks the hearts of those who witness it, and their sorrow is the greater because so little can be done to relieve; it can only be borne patiently till it wears itself out, and unfortunately those who have stored up this agony for themselves do not generally understand how to bear pain in patience.

But those who have checked the lower, sensual desires will avoid this stage, passing the first part of the existence after death either in unconsciousness or in happy dreams. Having put no energy into these desires, there is nothing to cause activity at this stage.

But there are other desires which will find their fruition on the astral plane ; those which are directed to higher objects, such as art, literature, or even to spiritual pleasures, but which are associated with the desire for personal enjoyment. Everything, in short, which is tinged with the personality belongs to the astral plane, and binds us there after death. So there will be great variety in the experiences of men here, and according to the general character of the experiences we may divide the life after death on this plane into three broad divisions. They may, indeed, be regarded almost as distinct regions, for the differences in the condition of consciousness prevent any inter-communication between them.

The first, and lowest, is the abode of those who have been characterised during life by strong evil passions, by crime, brutality, sensuality, profligacy ; of "the very scum of humanity, murderers, ruffians, violent criminals of all types, drunkards, profligates, the vilest of mankind. None is here, with consciousness awake to its surroundings, save those guilty of brutal crimes, or of deliberate persistent cruelty, or possessed by some vile appetite."¹ "The atmosphere of this place is gloomy, heavy, dreary, depressing to an inconceivable extent. It seems to reek with all the influences most inimical to good, as in truth it does, being caused by the persons whose evil passions have led them to this dreary place."² "Save for the gloomy surroundings and the loathsomeness of a man's associates, every man here is the creator

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 121.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

of his own miseries. Unchanged, except for the loss of the bodily veil, men here show out their passions in all their native hideousness, their naked brutality; full of fierce unsatiated appetites, seething with revenge, hatred, longings after physical indulgences, which the loss of physical organs incapacitates them from enjoying; they roam, raging and ravening, through this gloomy region, crowding round all foul resorts on earth, round brothels and gin-palaces, stimulating their occupants to deeds of shame and violence, seeking opportunities to obsess them, and so to drive them into worse excesses."¹ For they are closely attached to earth by their earthly desires and passions, and are able by their thoughts to influence those of like character with themselves, as we shall see more clearly when we study the action of thought. This region is the "hell" of various religious systems, always described as a place of intense misery and torment. But we must remember that it is not a place of everlasting torture, for there is a limit to the energy of the passions and evil desires of even the worst and lowest of men, and when that limit has been reached they will pass out of hell into a more cheerful region. They will also, as we have seen, have learned a most important lesson; "by the tremendous pressure of Nature's disregarded laws they are learning the existence of those laws, and the misery that accrues from ignoring them in life and conduct. The lesson they would not learn during earth-life, whirled away on the torrent

¹ *Ancient Wisdom* A. Besant, p. 122.

of lusts and desires, is pressed on them here, and will be pressed on them in their succeeding lives, until the evils are eradicated and the man has risen into a better life.”¹

The second division is the abode of those whose interests during life have been wrapped up in trivial worldly pursuits, but without what we should characterise as vice or crime. They have not been free from evil passions, such as revenge, jealousy, anger, and all the forms of selfishness, but they have had sufficient control over themselves to avoid any violent expression of them. They have had strong desire for physical indulgence and worldly pleasures, but have not allowed themselves to be utterly enslaved by their desires. They have, in short, lived a selfish worldly life, but kept within the limits of decency. They find themselves surrounded by almost an exact copy of their surroundings on earth, but without the substantiality to which they are accustomed ; hence with them, as with those in the lowest division, there is no means of gratifying those of their desires which were connected with physical enjoyment. As these will be the most active, at least at first, they will be “dissatisfied, uneasy, restless, with more or less of suffering according to the vigour of the wishes they cannot gratify ; some even undergo positive pain from this cause, and are long delayed ere these earthly longings are exhausted.”² There will be great differences amongst those who are conscious here ; with those whose worldly desires have

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 125.

² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

not been much emphasised during life, the stay will be short and the dissatisfaction and restlessness far less in degree. But it will not be a place of unmixed happiness to any. It corresponds to the purgatory of the Roman Catholic, the Hades of the ancient Greek, and the other places, or states, of purification after death, that are taught in so many religious systems. For here, too, the lesson will be impressed on the individual that worldly desires are not a source of permanent happiness.

The third division is very different from these two. For there are some desires that are able to be gratified on the astral plane, being connected with the finer emotions and not with the senses. Such are the desires for the pleasures of art, of music, of intellectual enjoyment, and even for the pleasures of a materialistic heaven. Those who have desired these enjoyments for the sake of the pleasure they themselves derive from them, those who have desired to save their own souls and have thought of heaven as a place of happiness, these will all find their reward here. The artist here no longer feels the need of physical scenery to feast his eyes upon; for the astral counterparts of physical objects are far more beautiful, more luminous, more richly coloured than the objects themselves; and he finds here scenes of beauty far surpassing the most beautiful he has even dreamed of. This region is composed of the subtler matter of the plane, and it is singularly luminous and transparent, and the tints are purer and brighter even than the purest we ever see in the sky at sunset. Here, too, the musician can continue to delight in the strains of melody that en-

chanted him during life, but the tones are sweeter and richer than on earth. The student is still surrounded by his books, living in an "astral library," where he finds stores of knowledge beyond what were accessible to him during life, for his desire will bring to him the astral counterparts of the books he longed for on earth, but was not able to get. The earnest and pious religionist, who has looked forward to a heaven whose streets are paved with gold and precious stones, will here find the object of his desire; or, if his heaven has been a garden of trees and beautiful flowers, where he can rest in ease under the shade, delighting in the scent of the flowers and the sweet singing of the birds, then also he will find here the heaven he has pictured.¹ True, it will be his own creation, the result of the thought-forms he himself has built, but it will be none the less real to him on that account; and he will here reap to the full the happiness he has desired. This, then, will be a state of happiness to all, but with most there is also a consciousness that it is not a lasting state, and that a time will come when they will pass on into something higher. Their stay here, however, is useful to them, and it enables them to bring to greater perfection the faculties they have cultivated during life; the artist will come back to earth with a greater artistic faculty than before, the musician will have greater musical faculty, the pious religionist will come back with increased piety. There will, in short, be a continuing of the development that was

¹ See *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 130-134.

begun on earth, though no beginning of new lines of growth.

The majority of men pass consciously through both the second and third divisions, but many stay in them a very short time, having put little energy into even the best of the selfish and personal desires. But after a time, whether short or long, the energy of all personal desires has exhausted itself, even with the most selfish of mankind, and then there is no more use for the astral body. The individual then withdraws from it as before he withdrew from the physical body, and it is left to disintegrate on the astral plane.

Then he lives in his mental and causal bodies, and passes on to the next plane, the mental, living in a portion of that plane which is sometimes known as Devachan, the heaven-world. Nothing that belongs only to the personality, nothing in which the egoistic tendency has predominated, can enter here, for this is the region of love, of that larger love which takes pleasure in giving rather than in receiving. Every unselfish act done for another, every unselfish and loving thought, every pure aspiration, will here meet with its full reward. Just as there is great variety in the conditions of people on the astral plane, so also is there here. For there are probably none, or certainly exceedingly few, in whom there has not been *some* unselfish impulse ; and it matters not how degraded the life may have been on the whole, if there has been but one unselfish thought, but one noble aspiration, if there has been but ~~one~~ one being who has been cared for on earth with an unselfish love, that

will bring the individual to Devachan ; for no cause fails of its effect, and the law gives us the reward for our good deeds, however few and poor they may be, with as full and unerring justice as it metes out to us the suffering that results from our wrong actions. True, those whose unselfish impulses have been weak and few will have but a scanty reward, but it will be as much as they are able to appreciate and utilise. "Their cup is but a small one, but it is filled to the brim with bliss, and they enjoy all that they are able to conceive of heaven."¹ So those whose only unselfish thoughts have been connected with their family love will be surrounded by those they have loved on earth, and will find perfect bliss in communion with them. For in Devachan we meet those we love as they really are at their best, and there is there no separation, no misunderstanding. Here on earth there are constant barriers separating us from our friend ; we see him through the limitations and imperfections of his personality as well as through those of our own. There we shall see him as he is in his inner self, comparatively free from limitation and imperfection, for all his lower desires which are the cause of his failings and imperfections while on earth, fell asleep, like our own, when he left his astral body. So we see only that which is good in our friend, and he sees only that which is good in us ; our love is deepened and strengthened by the sweetness and purity of this intercourse, and we shall come back with greater power to love, and the circle of our affection will be widened. The philanthropist who

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 196.

during life has worked for men because he loved them will here be developing greater powers to help. He will work out in thought to fuller perfection the schemes he tried to carry out on earth, and so he will return with the same love for humanity, the same aspirations, but they will be yet stronger and deeper than before, and he will have greater knowledge as to how he may most wisely realise his aspirations in active works of benevolence.

The musician, the painter, the sculptor, who have worked for love of their art, and with the desire to refine and elevate humanity, will here find fuller opportunities to exercise their faculties. "Noblest music, ravishing beyond description, peals forth from the mightiest monarchs of harmony that earth has known, as Beethoven, no longer deaf, pours out his imperial soul in strains of unexampled melody, making even the heaven-world more melodious as he draws down harmonies from higher spheres, and sends them thrilling through the heavenly places. Here, also, we find the masters of painting and of sculpture learning new hues of colour, new curves of undreamed beauty. . . . Searchers into Nature are here, and they are learning her hidden secrets ; before their eyes are unrolling systems of worlds with all their hidden mechanism, woven series of workings of unimaginable delicacy and complexity ; they shall return to earth as great 'discoverers,' with unerring intuitions of the mysterious ways of Nature."¹ Those who have been full of religious aspiration, whose hearts have gone

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 198, 199.

out to God in pure and fervent devotion, who have asked only for the privilege of serving the Lord whom they love and reverence, will here enter into the very presence of their Lord. "The concept of the Divine which was formed by their mind when on earth here meets them in the radiant glory of devachanic matter, fairer, diviner, than their wildest dreams. The Divine One limits Himself to meet the intellectual limits of His worshipper, and in whatever form the worshipper has loved and worshipped Him, in that form He reveals Himself to his longing eyes, and pours out on him the sweetness of His answering love. . . .

"Such souls grow in purity and in devotion under the sun of this communion, and return to earth with these qualities much intensified." ¹

All the noblest and purest part of our nature is thus cultivated and intensified in the heaven-world. As in the astral world, we are limited to the activities that have been initiated in earth-life, but not one of those fails to bring about its full result, and thus it is that the bliss of the heaven-world has always been said to be beyond our power to describe or even to conceive. If we think of ourselves when we are at our very best, when some tale of heroism has stirred our souls and roused our enthusiasm, when some sight of sorrow has drawn out our tenderest love and sympathy, when some grand symphony, some exquisite painting has stirred to activity our noblest and purest emotions, or when in the ecstasy of devotion we have laid ourselves at the feet of the Lord, and

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 196, 197.

have felt His presence lifting us above all the petty concerns of life, filling us with deepest adoration and aspiration and surrounding us with an atmosphere of intense bliss, then we have but the faintest reflection of the joys of the heaven-world. For our best moments here are always marred by the limitations of our form and our surroundings, it is only some rays from the pure light of spirit that are able to penetrate through the veils of matter, and we are soon dragged down again by our lower natures. But there the light of our spirit shines forth in all the fulness to which it has yet attained, no veils of dense matter cloud or obstruct it, and there is nothing to drag us down, for our lower desires have all fallen asleep. So it is little wonder that saints and poets have used such glowing terms when they have tried to describe these joys. And when we remember how our experiences down here of ecstasy and devotion, or even of the purer emotions, strengthen us, and enable us to go out into our round of duties here with purer motive and brighter hope, we can readily understand how our life in the heaven-world makes us stronger, purer, and more fit for our next earth-life.

But there is a yet higher heaven that we touch before returning to earth. For we know only too well that the activities during earth-life that have earned for us the experience in the heaven-world are limited ; with most of us they probably form the smallest part of our activity ; and when the energy we have accumulated by them is exhausted, we must pass out of our mental body as we have passed out of the astral and physical before. It

then disintegrates as they have done, and we dwell for a time in the causal body. To the majority the abode in this highest heaven is very brief, for they have done little on earth that renders consciousness here possible. It is only the loftiest thoughts and aspirations that find their fruition here, for they alone awaken any vibration in the causal body; and it is only as we learn how transitory all worldly objects are that we can rise to these thoughts and aspirations. So long as we are bound down by form we cannot have any vivid consciousness here, for it is the world where form is transcended. So the majority "become unconscious as the mental body slips away into disintegration. Then for a moment they are aroused to consciousness, and a flash of memory illumines their past, and they see its pregnant causes; and a flash of fore-knowledge illumines their future, and they see such effects as will work out in the coming life. This is all that very many are as yet able to experience of the formless world. For here again, as ever, the harvest is according to the sowing, and how should they who sowed nothing for that lofty region expect to reap any harvest therein?"¹

But those who have risen "above the bondage of the flesh and of passion,"² and have begun on earth to perceive the unity in all beings, will here enter consciously into this highest heaven. Knowledge ever-expanding will be theirs, communion unbroken with the Great Ones of the past and of the present, and joy which is as much

¹ *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, pp. 201, 202.

² *Ibid.*, p. 202.

beyond the joy of the lower heaven-world as that is beyond the happiness of the third division of the astral plane. On this it is best to be silent, for only those who have seen and experienced can know what is the bliss of this region.

But it too will be limited to these highest activities of the life that is past, and when their energy is exhausted the time will come for return to earth.

Thus our existence after death is a complete utilisation of all the experiences of the past life, and a reaping of their results. It is a passage from pain through purificatory suffering on through increasing happiness to the highest and intensest bliss of which we are yet capable. Those who have lived mainly in the lower desires, and have but slightly developed the higher nature, will have prepared for themselves a long period of suffering with a proportionately short enjoyment of heaven; while those who have held but loosely to the things of the senses will pass quickly, and in some cases unconsciously, through the lower stages, first awaking after death to the happiness of the heaven-world, which will for them occupy by far the longer part of the interval between successive lives. All will taste of heaven, for there are probably none so depraved as not to have had a single unselfish thought, or a single aspiration to something higher than they have yet attained; and nothing can fail to bring about its result.

During this period, also, we learn some of the lessons we need as to the relative value of different objects of desire, as to the results of disobedience to the law, and

these lessons are strongly impressed on the individual, though he may not in the next life remember how he has learned them. There has also been a building of faculty ; all our efforts towards growth during life finding their fruition in the possession of the corresponding faculty in our next life.

If we but realised all this, death would lose all its terrors for us. We should come to regard it simply as a halting-place on our journey ; we have completed one stage, and we but pause for a few hours during which we review the stage we have completed, note the lessons of experience gained during it, and prepare ourselves to set out on the next stage. It would lose all the agony that is associated with the loss of those we love, for we should know that we do not lose them ; that not only shall we meet them again in the heaven-world, but that even now there is no real separation ; we are separated in body just as we are when one of us travels to a distant country ; but in thought, which is the truer reality, we are even closer than during life, for there are fewer veils of matter separating heart from heart. To those who are left behind there is a seeming separation, those who have gone on know it is only an illusion.

And then, when the time comes for re-birth, it is gladly and with understanding that we return. First when the individual has exhausted his experiences in the causal body, he gathers round himself the matter of the lower subdivisions of the mental plane, forming for himself a mental body similar to the one he had in his last incarnation, but better suited for the ex-

pression of the faculties he has built up as the result of that life. Then he gathers round this an astral body, also similar to the last, for he has still the same emotions, the same desires. Then he is guided by some of those great intelligences who are carrying out the will of God to the family where he will be provided with a body suited to his character, and where he will be in the surroundings needed for his further progress, and will be brought in contact with those to whom he is bound by ties of affection or by debts of responsibility contracted in the past. And now he is ready for the next stage in his journey; the same man as before, though his body and surroundings are different, and with all the inheritance, whether for good or evil, that he has made for himself. For the desires of the past wake up again now that they are again in the midst of the surroundings fitted for their activity. But added to all this he has the result of his life on the higher planes, for he knows more clearly than before that certain things are good, and that certain others must be avoided. We call this an instinctive moral sense, or the voice of conscience, but it is in reality the reflection of the memory impressed on the self of the experiences gained, of the lessons learned.

We see then that the real man, the individual who goes on from incarnation to incarnation, has one body which never changes. The physical, astral, and mental bodies are left behind and disintegrate, and new ones take their place in the next life; but the causal body goes on from life to life. It is the storehouse for all his

experiences, for as each body is thrown aside the essence of its experiences is, so to speak, handed on to the causal body. It is this, indeed, which makes it possible for him to preserve his identity from life to life; and when we can develop our consciousness to such an extent that it can work freely in the causal body, we shall be able to look back through our past lives, and carry our consciousness from life to life without a break. Then we shall, indeed, have conquered death, and shall be nearing the point when earth will have no more lessons to teach us.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOAL OF HUMANITY

WE have seen that the aim of our life here is to develop all the potentialities that are latent in us, and that we do this by means of the experiences we pass through during our lives on earth. We come each life into a different environment, where our experiences must be different from those we have had before, different qualities and faculties will be brought into play, and our character will thus become gradually more complete. A point will therefore be reached at last when we have exhausted all the experiences that earth-life can afford, and have learned all the lessons it is able to teach us. We may, perhaps, think that it is hardly necessary, or even possible, for one individual to undergo every experience that earth can afford, for the conditions of life change as evolution advances, and there will thus be new opportunities constantly arising, which are not identical with those that have existed before ; but we can readily understand that in a very long series of incarnations he will pass through every *class* of experience that earth-life can give. Some experiences may have to be repeated many times

before he learns the lesson they are intended to convey, but ultimately he will have learned all the lessons that earth-life can teach, and its utility will have ceased for him ; just as the utility of school-life ceases for a child, when his education is completed.

Let us try to realise, in part at least, what this means. A stage is first reached when he will have learned to discriminate between good and evil in all matters connected with the physical plane, and also in many things that concern the higher planes, for his consciousness will be awake on these planes as well. He will have learned that desire brings but transient pleasure ; he will recognise that the more closely a desire is connected with the things of earth the more fleeting is the pleasure arising from it, and the more necessary it is to turn the attention away from it and to desire the things that are less fleeting ; thus step by step he will have learned to discriminate between the real and the unreal, he will have overcome desire, and his thoughts will be centred on the reality, on the Self. Every faculty that was latent within him will have had full opportunity for development ; the emotions will be pure and lofty, the intellect will be well trained, the mind will be steady and controlled. His moral nature will be noble and strong, he will not only discriminate between right and wrong, but he will always unhesitatingly choose the right ; the wrong will have no attraction for him, he will indeed be incapable of yielding to the ordinary temptations of life. Side by side with this purity and strength of character will be a tender sympathy with others. He will himself have passed

beyond the power of suffering as ordinary men suffer, for the ordinary causes of suffering will have ceased to have any hold on him; and yet he will be able to enter fully into the pain of another. For his own past will at this stage be to some extent opened to him, he will see some of the steps up which he has climbed, and though he himself has now entered into a fuller joy, he will still be able to remember the pain and toil of climbing those steps. So he will understand the suffering of others, and will be able to enter into their feelings in a way that one less advanced could not do. So his sympathy will be full and rich, and yet, seeing the use and meaning of pain, the advice and help he gives will be the best and wisest. He will have gained control over his subtler bodies, and will be able to function on the higher planes, so that wide knowledge will be open to him, and he will be able to see the essence of things and not their mere shadow. He will, in short, have reached a stage which we should call perfection. For such a man as that, we naturally ask, of what use would further lives on earth be? he surely has nothing more to gain. Such is the goal towards which we are travelling now; such is the goal which has already been reached by some. For we are taught that humanity has been evolving for long ages in the past, and the elder brothers of the race long ago reached the end of this path which some of us, the younger brothers, are only now beginning to tread.

But this is not the end; beyond this there stretches yet another path, whose end "is lost in glorious light Nirvānic," in the treading of which yet loftier heights are

reached, heights on which "lie, bathed in the sunlight of the spirit, glories untold, unseen by any save the eye of soul."¹ Of this we can say but little, for we are not yet able to understand its glory, nor the divine perfection that is attained thereon. But the sages of the past have taught us somewhat of the stages of which it consists. For, as it is trodden, the last remains of all that binds a man to earth are cast away. He learns by actual realisation the truths which before he only accepted intellectually; all possibility of doubt and superstition, in however subtle a form, thus falls away. All sense of separateness is lost, he feels that he is one with all that exists; and thus there grows in him a yet more tender sympathy, a yet fuller love which "wraps everything within its tender embrace. He is 'the friend of every creature,' the 'lover of all that lives' in a world where all things live."² The last vestiges of desire now drop from him; he desires nothing save to be a channel through which the love of God may be poured out upon man, an instrument by means of which the "will of God" may be "done on earth." For as he has developed thus, he has learned to know God; beginning with love and reverence, he has grown through the most perfect devotion into that unity with God, in which he has no will save the divine will. For him life has no attractions, yet it does not repel him; form attracts him not, yet he is willing to be limited in form, if so he can the better serve the Lord. The last trace of "egoism," of "I-

¹ *Voice of the Silence*, H. P. Blavatsky, p. 30.

² *Ancient Wisdom*, A. Besant, p. 405.

ness," falls away; he no longer feels himself as "I," but as a part of the universal life. He and his Father have become one, and he is ready to "enter into the joy of his Lord." So he stands, as it were, on the threshold of Nirvâna, bathed in the light of the ineffable glory that lies beyond, his soul thrilling with its unspeakable joys. And in the midst of the glory and the joy there is ever in his heart the tender thought of the humanity he loves, still struggling, toiling slowly and painfully up the mountain heights that he has successfully scaled. And with the cry of pain that rises from them there mingles a whisper that has echoed within him again and again through his long journey, the voice of the Self that is at the very heart of all things; and it repeats to him: "Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt *thou* be saved, and hear the whole world cry?"¹ Too well has he learned the lesson of love to be deaf to that cry of pain, that whisper of compassion. He knows full well that for him the glorious joy of Nirvâna would turn to bitter sorrow, deeper than any known on earth, if, deaf to that cry of pain and to the whisper of compassion, he were to pass within, and close the door behind him. Not for that has he travelled this long and toilsome journey, not for that has he wearily climbed the steep and rugged mountain-side; but that the door at which he stands may be opened the wider by his presence, and that the light and glory from beyond it may stream forth, and shed a little more of its radiance on the weary pilgrims who are toiling up the mountain-

¹ *Voice of the Silence*, H. P. Blavatsky, p. 99.

side. For he knows that the heart of God Himself is love, that He is ever giving Himself to the world ; that it is He who breathes in every form that lives, He that rejoices in every joy of man, He that suffers in every pain of every one of the creatures whom He loves. Then how can he who has felt his unity with God hold himself back? his only joy will be to offer himself to the Lord, that he also may be poured out in the free gift of love to the world. And so he goes forth, a very pillar of strength and light and love, shedding the radiance of the Divine love around him on all ; doing the will of God, helping in His mighty labour of drawing all men to Himself.

Many are the paths that here open out before him. He may pass on into other worlds than ours, other spheres of being, where some other humanity is toiling and striving. It might then appear to us as if he had vanished into the bliss of Nirvâna, and were leaving unhelped those younger than himself. But this is not so ; whatever path he may follow, he will ever be serving the Lord of all things in his own appointed way, for endless are the services He requires, infinite in variety must be His servants.

But there are some of these elder brothers who have chosen the path that keeps them in close touch with our earth, resolved never to leave the humanity through which they gained their own liberation, until every one of their brothers shall have reached the summit they themselves have attained, shall have scaled the heights of perfection. They it is whom we call the Helpers of Humanity, the Masters, the Adepts, the Mahâtmas, or

Great Souls. From Their ranks have come the great sages and teachers of the past, the founders of the great world religions, the Saviours of men. Ever are They watching humanity, ever with tenderness and wisdom guiding it over the rough places, ever helping it in the crises that from time to time arise. Many are Their functions, many Their methods of work, but all are alike characterised by Their love for humanity and Their power to help. Strength and tenderness, wisdom and love, these are the godlike qualities that shine forth in Them.

Having reached the goal of human perfection, They can function at will on any one of the three planes on which our evolution is proceeding, and therefore can help us equally while we are living on the physical plane, and during the interval between successive earth-lives. It is not our personalities that They help, but our real selves, and thus it matters not to Them whether we are in a physical body or not. Nor do They care whether or not They are seen and known of us; They work unseen, unrecognised, unthanked, even as God Himself works in every form. Thought is a far stronger power than any force that can be used on the physical plane, and it is mainly by thought that They work. From Them come many of those flashes of genius that illumine the minds of our great thinkers and philosophers; from Them come many of those visions of beauty, those strains of exquisite harmony, that the artist and musician strive to embody in forms of colour or of sound, which to others seem full of purest inspiration,

though their authors themselves are ever conscious how far their power of expression falls short of the reality. From Them come many of the promptings to heroic and noble deeds of unselfish love, when man becomes almost divine. From Them come many of the great discoveries of the laws of nature, as They unfold them to the gaze of the earnest, patient, unselfish seeker after truth. We cannot tell whence these things come; they seem to well up from the mysterious depths of our own being, we know not how nor why; nor can we control their coming. But we understand them better, and they awaken in us a deeper sense of gratitude, awe, and reverence, when we begin to realise that it is Those who love humanity, who are opening our eyes to see the truths. They are waiting to teach, who are unfolding before us the wondrous beauty and glory of God, and who are leading us by the hand that we may be stronger to live a life of noble and heroic activity. From Them, above all, come those great spiritual movements, that from time to time save humanity from sinking into materialism, and carry it forward through some great crisis in its evolution. If They see that special help or guidance is needed, then one from amongst Themselves will come and live among men in physical form. He may still be unrecognised, unknown, for He will veil Himself lest He should overpower those He has come to help. We are as yet so imperfect, so undeveloped, that we should be as little able to appreciate Him if He showed Himself to us in all His greatness, as one who has had but a very slight musical training would be to appreciate one of the classic

symphonies of the great masters. It may be said of Him as it has been said of the Logos Himself: "He veils Himself within the limits which serve the creatures whom He has come to help. Ah, how different He is, this Mighty One, from you and me. When we are talking to someone who knows a little less than ourselves, we talk out all we know to show our knowledge, expanding ourselves as much as we can so as to astonish and make marvel the one to whom we speak; that is because we are so small that we fear our greatness will not be recognised unless we make ourselves as large as we can to astonish, if possible, to terrify; but when He comes who is really great, who is mightier than anything which He produces, He makes Himself small in order to help those whom He loves."¹

And thus we may see in the Master, when He comes on earth in physical form, nothing more than a man, better than most men, wiser, and stronger to help, but still only a man; and because His thoughts, His interests, His actions, are not as ours, but rise above this petty life to the spiritual realities, we may even regard Him as a dreamer, a fanatic, one who marks himself off from others by his eccentricities. Nay, there are even those who, looking at Him through the misty atmosphere of their own imperfections, fancy that it is in Him that these imperfections exist! It is only the few, who are beginning, however humbly and feebly, to tread the earlier steps of the path which He has trodden to the very end, who are able to see in Him the teacher, the guide, the saviour of men. Hence the great world-teachers have been

¹ *Avatâras*, A. Besant, pp. 23, 24.

misunderstood, slandered, and vilified, persecuted, slain, through the blindness and ignorance of the many ; and it is only subsequent generations that have been able to recognise Them, because they have seen Them, not with their own eyes, but through the eyes of Their few immediate followers and disciples, who understood. But this matters not to Them ; for They come to help humanity not simply in one age, but through all time ; and They know that the very self-limitation which causes the many to misunderstand draws Them the nearer to the hearts of the few, and through them the nearer to the heart of the humanity of the future, who will learn to understand.

Another part of Their work for humanity is the training and teaching of those who are consciously and deliberately treading the path which leads to this goal. Ever and again, one and another catches some glimpse of the goal, and of the exquisite, tender beauty of the Teachers, and resolves to reach Them. His aspirations are then turned towards Them, his love and reverence go out to Them, and he seeks to guide his actions and thoughts as he thinks would be pleasing to Them. He strives to purify his thoughts and desires, he keeps a constant watch over himself, he begins to aim at steadiness and control of the mind ; his devotion to Them becomes stronger, he cherishes it as the most sacred possession of his heart ; and, recognising that They love humanity, and work for it, he also begins in all things to seek the happiness and good of others rather than his own. For They say to him, that, if he would reach

Them, he must " be in full accord with all that lives ; bear love to men as though they were his brother-pupils, disciples of one teacher, the sons of one sweet mother." ¹ So his life begins to be marked by his constant and careful thought for others ; as he journeys towards the point where he shall at last meet his Master, he is ever ready to help a younger brother ; ever as he takes a step forward himself does he hold out his hand to help another to take the same step ; ever is he willing to stop by the way to dry some tear of pain, to help a brother over a rough place, to give strength to the weak, to tend and lift up those who have fallen by the way. His love grows deeper and deeper, as his reverence for the Masters becomes more intense, until at last he reaches the entrance to the path which They have trodden before him. Not one of his efforts is left without response from Them. From the first moment that he definitely resolves to reach Them, Their loving eyes are resting upon him, They are shedding upon him all the peace and strength he is able to take from Them. He may not see Them, nor hear Them ; he may not even know that They are watching and guiding him, but that matters not, for he is steadily approaching nearer to Them, slipping many times, it maybe, but ever rising again after his fall, and renewing his efforts ; until at last he comes into conscious touch with his own special Teacher, and is then directly trained by Him and utilised for the helping of others.

Much of the work of the Masters is done through

¹ *Voice of the Silence*, H. P. Blavatsky, pp. 70, 71.

these pupils, and even, to a more limited extent, through those who are as yet only aspiring towards discipleship. They too may work unknown, unrecognised, and unthanked, for they are beginning to tread their Master's path, and they strive to follow Him in all things. If marked out at all from others, it is only by a greater gentleness, a deeper tenderness, a greater patience with the weaknesses of others, a readier sympathy, and a clearer intuition, which enables them to understand others and thus to see more clearly what help each one may need.

If it be asked why these Masters do not show Themselves to the world, why They do not come forth, and work mighty works so as to convince men of Their existence and of Their greatness, the answer is simple. Were They to do so, it would not help Their work, for They can better reach by other means the few who are able to appreciate Them. Those who are ready to live a purer, holier, more loving life, a life of service to man, will believe in Them without any external manifestations; and the others would not believe even though they saw; or, even if they were intellectually convinced, it still would not change their lives; for change comes from within, not from without. They would misunderstand, slander, and persecute, even as men in past times have done. Though this would in no way injure the Masters, or impede the work They are doing, yet it would hinder the slanderer and the persecutor. It is for men's own sake that They keep Themselves hidden from the world, that men may not be tempted to blaspheme.

Yet other stages of progress there are, even higher than this, where yet greater Beings, the product of earlier cycles of evolution, are guiding and helping our evolution in other ways. In all religions we find Them, referred to under various names, as, for example, the Angels and Archangels of Christianity, the Seven Spirits around the throne, the ministers of God, ever ready to do His bidding. They have various functions to perform, having each some special phase of evolution to direct and guide. Mighty in intelligence and power, They take the general scheme of evolution as planned in the mind of the Logos, and, following His thought, work out the details. These are the Ameshaspentas of the Zoroastrians, the Sephiroth of the Hebrew Kabbala, the Devas of the Hindu religion, the great gods of the elements, the Lords of Karma, and many other classes of deities. Hence has arisen the idea that in certain religions, commonly regarded as heathen, polytheism is taught. But these Intelligences, mighty as They are, are subordinate to the Logos; They are His ministers, carrying out His will. And it is His life that animates Them all; could we but see Them as They are, we should see the unity of the life, and should recognise the one God manifesting Himself under many forms; for each form, being limited, is but a partial manifestation of Him. But we see Them through our own imperfect vision, which sees only the separated forms, and cannot recognise the underlying unity. So we fear lest we might offend the one God and be lacking in veneration to Him, if we show gratitude and reverence to these ministers of

His will. The day was in the past, and may be again in the future, when men recognised that to neglect to worship Them showed a lack of reverence to God ; and so they worshipped Him by offerings of love and gratitude to all His ministers. But this day cannot return till men are purer in thought and in life, till they recognise that the spiritual is more to be desired than the material ; for till then the eyes of the soul will continue to be clouded by the mists of materiality.

One other class of Beings there is associated with humanity in a way that draws Them even closer to the hearts of men than any other. These are the Avatâras, who, evolving cycle after cycle, universe after universe, have at length climbed to such a height that They have become in the fullest sense one with the Logos. They have risen through the various stages of humanity, on through the various degrees of Those who no longer need to reincarnate on earth, still on and on, higher and higher, until at last They have "entered Ishvara" [the Logos] "Himself, and expanded into the all-consciousness of the Lord, becoming one in knowledge as they had ever been one in essence with that eternal Life from which originally They came forth, living in that life, centres without circumferences, living centres, one with the Supreme."¹

Through Them, as through no others, can a manifestation be given to man of the Supreme, even in all His glory, for no veil, however thin, separates Them from Him. In them is no limitation, no form ; They alone,

¹ *Avatâras*, A. Besant, p. 15.

of all who have reached the loftier stages of evolution, have cast away the last vestige of form, so that their union with Him may be complete. But still there remains the power to take form, in order that by so doing They may reveal Him to man. And so whenever in the history of humanity there has been decay of righteousness, forgetfulness of God, and exaltation of unrighteousness, then the Avatâra has come forth, has veiled Himself in the form that was most fitted to the needs of the time, and has lived among men, showing forth God, a Divine incarnation in very truth. In every religion we find the teaching either of one or more such Divine Incarnations, or else of the inspired prophet and teacher, the Master. It is in this that the real power of the religion lies, for the attribute of God that is most clearly and powerfully shown forth, both in the Avatâra and in the Master, is love. If we look at Christianity we see the pathos of the Divine Love in the figure of the Christ, as He moves amongst men, the "man of sorrows," and yet at the same time, the one in whom all others found peace and content, for in sharing the sufferings of men by His intense sympathy, He lifted them into a purer and calmer atmosphere. Or, look at Gautama the Buddha, there we have the Divine Compassion again, but in a different aspect. Love and tenderness towards all beings, from the lowest to the highest, recognition of the presence of the divine life in every form; deep sympathy with the sorrows of men, beginning with sadness but ending in the exultant joy which followed when, having reached illumination, the

causes of suffering and the means of liberation were known. Sri Rama shows us the love of God as reflected in the ideal of humanity ; the perfect son, husband, king, ever loyal to his duty, ever full of tenderness and devotion. In Sri Krishna, again the Divine Love, but in Him it is the joyous side, full of tenderness and grace ; in the child full of the exuberance of joyous love, with no shade of sorrow, and yet with the seriousness of wisdom ; in the grown-up man, the friend and teacher, still joy, but a serener joy, for He is there teaching still more clearly the lesson that no pain can enter the heart where He is enshrined ; for He is the beloved of all men, and where He is all is peace ; nor can aught separate from Him those who love and worship Him, for His devotees are "exceedingly dear" unto Him, and "he who seeth Me everywhere, and seeth everything in Me of him I will never lose hold, and he shall never lose hold of Me."¹ Thus through His Avatâras does the Lord show forth the glory of His love, whereby He is drawing all men to Himself, helping them to recognise Him in His universe, and redeeming them from the bonds of matter.

¹ *Bhagavad-Gîtâ.*

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEANING OF EVIL

WE have now traced out the broad outline of human evolution, have seen how human life on earth and after death is the means whereby man develops, how he continues life after life until he attains the highest perfection that can be gained through earthly experiences, and we have tried to catch some little glimpse of the possibilities that will open out before him when this stage is reached. We are thus in a position to apply these teachings to some of the practical problems of life.

There is one question, however, which is frequently asked under various forms, the answer to which lies at the basis of all practical applications of Theosophy, and we must therefore consider it first. Why, if man is divine in his origin, was it necessary for him to go through all this long process of evolution, and to fall into all manner of evil and sin? Why could he not have remained pure and untouched by evil all through? If the Logos is the source of everything in His universe, why, since He is good, is there evil in that which He has produced? What is the origin of evil, and what is its use?

Could not this universe have come into being without it, and would not that have been far better? What, in short, *is* evil?

To these questions the answer is often given that there could be no knowledge of good without the experience of evil, just as we should have no knowledge of the light unless we at times experienced the darkness; that there are the "pairs of opposites" throughout nature, and that neither of the two composing each pair could exist without the other. Or, looking at the question from a slightly different point of view, it is said that man could never develop strength to hold to the good, unless he gained it through conflict with evil. Both these statements are perfectly true, but they do not fully meet the difficulty. It is, indeed, hardly possible to do so, at our present stage of growth, but the study of the earliest stages of human evolution may perhaps throw some light on the question by modifying our views as to what evil really is.

We have seen that when human evolution first began, certain aspects of consciousness had been developed in the lower kingdoms; and that the human *form* was the direct outcome of this earlier evolution. Also, that though man himself is the seed of the Divine Life that was implanted in these forms, yet there was a certain merging between this and the lower life that had been evolving through the lower kingdoms, so that man reaped the benefit of all the progress there had been. He was thus a being with the power of experiencing and remembering sensations, of desiring to repeat those that had been

pleasant, and to avoid the unpleasant, and with the animal instincts that enabled him to gratify his desires. Beyond this, however, he had no knowledge; he had no power of reason; he was devoid of moral sense; he had no conception even of the existence of right and wrong; he simply lived for the gratification of his desires, for the pleasure of the moment. But there were infinite possibilities lying latent within him by virtue of that divine germ which was himself, and it was necessary that they should be brought out from latency into activity. He was not left unaided in this; even at this early stage he had his Teachers, the "Masters" of an earlier cycle of evolution, whose special work was to guide him in his first experiences of good and evil.

At this time his whole life was full of happiness, for he was as yet ignorant and innocent, or, to express it more accurately, he was innocent *because* he was ignorant. He had not sinned, for he did not yet know what sin was, so he *could* not sin. He was still living in the garden of Eden, in Paradise, and as he was yet innocent, his Teachers would come and walk with him under the shade of the trees in the evening, and teach him simple lessons as to how he should live, as to how he should cultivate the earth so that it might produce well, and as to how he could use the fruits that the earth brought forth. Pure and simple was his life, and his labours in the garden were a happiness to him, for he was living in harmony with nature; he did not yet know how to do otherwise. So it was an unconscious harmony, and it was inevitable that sooner

or later it should be broken. For, in the earlier stages of growth, desire looks only at the surface of things, and seeks only the pleasure that it sees; but fuller experience brings the knowledge that appearances are deceptive, and that many things which bring pleasure at the time lead afterwards to pain. And thus the mere gratification of desire must sooner or later have brought man into conflict with some one or another of the laws of nature. The process was hastened by his Teachers telling him that he must not do certain things, for, if he did, he would suffer. But these things looked pleasant; they were very much like other things that he had done before, and no suffering had followed them. So he was not satisfied, he wished to try for himself; indeed, he had even a suspicion that his Teachers had made a mistake. And so he disobeyed, and, though at first he found pleasure in the doing, for the fruit of the forbidden tree was very sweet to the taste, yet at length the suffering followed, just as the Teachers had said. As this experience was repeated, he began to realise that he had come into conflict with some law he had not known before. Up to this point he had regarded as good that which brought immediate pleasure, and as evil that which brought immediate pain; now he began to recognise that the law was more complex, that single acts brought about a variety of consequences, and that he must learn to discriminate between the more and the less important. In other words, he had tasted of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and now he could no longer stay in

the garden of Eden, for it was the garden of innocence, and he was no longer innocent. But if he had lost his innocence, he had also begun to lose his ignorance, and had taken one little step towards the development of the moral sense and of the reason. Everything was now changed for him ; no longer could he follow his desires without responsibility ; he must now learn by slow degrees to judge all things by their rightness or wrongness, instead of by their power to give immediate pleasure. For he had become as "one of the Gods" ; the first awakening of the divinity within him had taken place, and it was time for him to start on the long pilgrimage which would end in the attainment of perfection and union with God.

There was another tree in the garden which he was forbidden to touch, the Tree of Life, whose fruit gives "immortality" to those who eat of it, or freedom from the constant round of births and deaths. But if men touch its fruit too soon, it brings a fate worse than death, for it stops them in their pilgrimage, and takes away from them, at least for the time, the opportunity of progress. So the Teachers told man to go forth from the garden into the world of experience, there to toil, to suffer, and to learn ; and lest, in his impatience at the suffering, he should return and grasp at the fruit of the Tree of Life, so as to escape from the pain of experience, they placed at the gate of the garden, to "keep the way of the Tree of Life," the cherubim, angels of love and purity, and the "flame of a sword which turned every way," the sword of desire, so that if man should be

tempted to try to escape from the round of births, he should be irresistibly driven back by his desires.

So he set out on his long journey, opportunities of experience opening out before him more and more as he went on, desire for pleasure the force that was ever spurring him on; but the intelligence growing and widening to teach him to discriminate between the different kinds and degrees of pleasure he was gaining. Every desire, as he gratified it, intensified his pleasure; so he gratified it again and again, and each time his pleasure was increased. But after a while he found the pleasure was transitory, for he could not always be with the object of his desire, and separation from it brought pain. Further, the objects of desire were themselves transitory, and the time came when they were taken from him, apparently for ever, and the pain was greater than before. Even if they remained with him to the end of his earthly life, he found he could not take them with him when he left his physical body, and again there was pain. So little by little he learned to bring his intelligence to bear on the matter, and to avoid the objects of desire that he had found to be the most transitory, and to fix his desire on those that he believed to be permanent. But these again he found to be only relatively permanent; after a while they also passed from him, and he suffered. So he went on step by step, ever substituting one object of desire for another, and ever finding that it only ended in pain. And with each step his disappointment was more keen, his pain more severe. Until at last, with the help of his

Teachers, he began to realise that suffering came because, in his search for happiness, he looked ever downward instead of upward, seeking it outside himself instead of within. Then raising his eyes, at first uncertainly and timidly, he caught one little glimpse of the beauty of the divine, and saw that it was dimly reflected in himself. The turning-point was then reached, and slowly, with many slips and falls, he began to tread the path which leads out of desire to the realisation of the self.

In one of the Upanishads we are told of a tree on which are two birds. One is on the lower branches of the tree, hopping from branch to branch, and tasting of the fruits. The other sits at the top of the tree, motionless and silent, watching its companion below. The lower bird, as it tastes the fruit, finds that some is sweet, some is sour, some is bitter; and some, though sweet at the first tasting, leaves a bitter taste behind. So he begins to reject some of the fruit, and to choose that which looks the sweetest. He finds, also, that the fruit on the lowest branches is the least sweet, and that higher up is sweeter; so he hops from branch to branch, gradually going upwards. But he mounts slowly, for he keeps lingering, so that he may not miss any of the fruit that he thinks to be sweet. As he goes up, the sweet fruit becomes sweeter and sweeter, but the bitter fruit becomes more bitter, the sour fruit more sour; and it more and more often happens that the sweet fruit leaves a bitter taste behind. So he begins to wonder if the sweetness really compensates him for the bitterness and

sourness; and he is growing tired of the tasting of the fruit. Then, for the first time, as he is hopping to a higher branch, he catches a glimpse of the bird at the top of the tree. Its plumage is brilliant, and flashes brightly in the sunlight; he compares it with his own dull, dusky, feathers, and wishes that he too might become bright and beautiful. As he wishes this, he hears a strain of melody coming from the bird above, as if it were answering his unspoken thought and inviting him to come nearer. So he presses on more quickly, hopping from branch to branch. But he keeps losing sight of the bird above, its song keeps fading into silence, so he forgets it and again lingers, amusing himself with the fruit. Again he finds it more and more often bitter, again the song from above bursts forth, and his longing to be near that beautiful bird, and become like it, grows stronger and stronger, until at last he can bear it no longer, and, leaving the fruit, he flies straight to the top of the tree, only to find, to his astonishment and joy, that he and the bird above are one.

In the earlier stages of evolution, then, gratification of desire is the means of progress, and it was *good* for man to gratify every desire until he had found that it brought no lasting pleasure. Then it ceased to attract him, he had outgrown it, and another took its place; to have continued gratifying the old one would have been a hindrance to him now, just as it would be a hindrance to a child to go on playing with the toys of his infancy when he has outgrown them. So that which is a help at

one stage becomes a hindrance at the next. We might define good as that which helps man forward in his evolution, evil as that which hinders him. Good and evil are thus purely relative terms, that which is good at an earlier stage being evil at a later one, and, conversely, that which will be good at a later stage, being undesirable at an earlier one, as man would not appreciate it and so would not be helped forward by it. Similarly, that which is good for one individual is by no means necessarily good for another, for the two may stand at points in their growth that are very far asunder, and may require totally different experiences to carry them forward.

Seen in this light, the problem of evil finds a solution reconcilable with the teaching that all existence is the expression of the One Life. There is nothing which is evil *in its essence* ; everything is good in its right place, but everything becomes evil if removed from that place. All the suffering that we see around us, and that at times well-nigh breaks our hearts, can no longer be regarded as evil. It is the means, and the only possible means, by which we can learn the hollowness of desire ; for we shall find that every form of suffering springs originally from the desire for some impermanent object, and will cease to give pain as soon as the desire is transferred to a higher object. A deeper study will lead us even to recognise that suffering is a source of happiness, paradoxical as it may seem ! Our whole experience teaches us that nothing gives us so much pleasure as that for the attainment of which we have had to strive and to suffer, and the enjoyment is in many cases proportionate

to the effort that has been necessary, or even to the pain that has been incurred. Nay, we can go yet a step farther. For does not the very possibility of manifested life depend on the existence of pleasure and pain, one of the primary "pairs of opposites"? If the choice were in our hands, would not ninety-nine per cent., at the least, choose the necessity of pain rather than the absence of all manifestation? The "luxury of pain" is no mere poetical imagining, but is based on a fact that lies at the very root of human nature; and the supreme bliss of Nirvâna itself would lose all its glory if it were attainable with less pain and suffering than the sacrifice of one's whole life.

What we call sin we shall also begin to regard in a different light; for we shall recognise that he who sins may be only following the law of his growth by seeking experience. We may try to turn him away from his sin, we may point out to him how the persistence in it will bring pain. It is right for us to do so, for we are travelling on together, and should help each other on the way. But we may find that he will not listen to us; he does not, perhaps, admit that his conduct is wrong; or, admitting that it is likely, or even certain, to bring pain, he still prefers to continue it for the pleasure of the doing, and to take the pain that follows. If this be so, we can do no more; for it shows that he has not yet learned the lesson this experience has to teach. If he listens, he has already learned the lesson, he is ready to take a step forward, and was only waiting for a brother's hand to be stretched out to help him on. If not, then we

must wait patiently, not condemning, for that would raise a barrier between us ; and we know that sooner or later he will reach the turning-point, and will then need a friend to stand by him and help him to retrace his steps. So we shall be content to wait, for we shall know that the law of evolution cannot err. Thus greater charity will begin to mark our conduct towards others, greater wisdom our efforts to help them. Moreover, we shall understand that if we have ourselves grown beyond some failing, it is because experience has taught us that the pleasure of gratification is not worth the pain it brings ; so when we see the same failing in another, the knowledge that we ourselves have experienced it will give us a deeper sympathy, and a more earnest wish to help. But we shall never despair of a brother ; even though at times it may seem as if he were sinking hopelessly into sin, even though each time he strives to raise himself he may fall back and apparently sink yet deeper, still we shall not be deceived. When we are climbing a mountain height, we may have to go down into the valleys from time to time, as we rise from peak to peak, but we go down only that we may rise again to a higher peak beyond. So we are going forwards just as much when we are going down into the valley as when we are climbing up the other side. In the long journey of evolution there are many peaks to climb before we reach the heights, and they are separated by many valleys that have to be traversed. So our brother is but going down into one of the valleys ; the Divine Life is working in him, and sooner or later he will realise the true nature

of his sin ; then the lowest point of the valley will have been reached, he will begin to climb up the other side, and will need our help. Gentleness, patience, and love, these are the qualities which this view of evil will cause to develop in us ; a readiness ever to give help to those who suffer, and to those who sin ; a steady, loving patience when our help is rejected.

But to ourselves there will be greater sternness, greater resolution in overcoming a wrong tendency when once we have recognised it as such. Nay, even if we only *doubt* the rightness of an action, we should refrain from doing it, for the very doubt is the first sign that we have already suffered from similar actions, and that the time has come for us to rise above them. If we *know* that it is wrong, we shall be stern in our resolve not to do it, recognising that it would be *for us* a step backward, and that no unit in the great band of humanity can slip back, even one step, without weakening the whole ; and that to do wrong knowingly will bring to ourselves far greater suffering than when it was done in ignorance. So if the relativity of good and evil is rightly understood, it will not, as some fear, render us careless as to whether we do right or wrong, but rather it will make us far more rigid to ourselves, while more tender and patient with others. Before perfection can be reached, "Thy soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit ; as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for others' woes, as hard as that fruit's stone for thine own throes and sorrows."¹

We shall thus see more clearly how the love of God is

¹ *Voice of the Silence*, H. P. Blavatsky, p. 83.

working everywhere. Too often we see only the suffering around us, and are blind to the Divine Life working beneath and through it. But when we begin to understand how the law of evolution is working, we shall see behind the suffering, and shall not only learn to trust in the Divine Love that "doeth all things well," but shall even begin to understand why it works in so mysterious a way. Our hearts will then no longer break over the pain of humanity, for we shall realise that "*all* things work together for good," not only for those who love God, but also for those who have not yet caught even the first glimpse of His beauty.

CHAPTER IX

THE POWER OF THOUGHT

It is said in one of the Upanishads: "Thoughts alone cause the round of births; let a man strive to purify his thoughts; what a man thinks, that he is; this is the old secret."¹ And again: "Here they say that a person consists of desires; and as is his desire, so is his will; and as is his will, so is his deed; and whatsoever deed he does, that will he reap."² For it has always been recognised by the Sages that thought is one of the strongest of forces, and that it influences a man's life more than anything else. And at the present time many people are beginning to realise this truth, and to mould their lives accordingly.

We have already noticed two ways in which thought works; first, that our thoughts produce habits in the astral and mental bodies, or tendencies to vibrate in a particular way in preference to any other; secondly, that thought builds up forms in the subtle matter in which it works.

¹ *Maitrayana Upanishad*, vi. 34 (3).

² *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, iv. 4. (5).

Now we can utilise the formation of habits in the subtle bodies to help us in the building of character. For we have seen that different kinds of physical vibration work in different kinds of matter, and this is equally true of thought-vibrations. To express it very broadly and generally, the more the thought is connected with the personality, the coarser is the variety of astral matter which will be set vibrating by it; while the more spiritual thoughts, those connected with the higher nature and not merely with the personality, will produce vibrations in the finer astral matter. Our astral and mental bodies are both built up by our desires and thoughts, and hence they will consist mainly of coarser or finer matter according to the nature of our predominant thoughts. Suppose, then, that we have a certain habit of thought which we recognise as not being good, and we therefore determine to get rid of it. There will be in our astral body a considerable amount of the matter that vibrates to this particular thought, and we shall have to get rid of it before the habit is conquered. We shall begin then by cultivating the habit of thinking thoughts of exactly an opposite character. This will cause the astral body to vibrate in a way that is not harmonious with the vibrations of the matter which has been built into the body by the habit we are trying to cure. A sense of effort and discomfort will be the result, but little by little this matter will be loosened and shaken out of the body by the antagonistic vibrations, and finer matter will be built in instead, which vibrates readily in response to the new

habit of thought. Then the sense of effort will cease, the old habit of thought will no longer be a temptation to us, but will have been conquered by the new one. Mere resistance to the old habit, and the effort not to yield to it, is a far weaker force; the objectionable matter will then not be shaken out of the body, but simply left to drop out under the influence of the atrophy that results from disuse. To take a concrete illustration it would take far longer to overcome a tendency to think unkind thoughts of another person by simply refusing to let ourselves think of him at all than by deliberately setting ourselves to think kind thoughts of him and to think only of his good qualities. It is a difference similar to that between leaving any living creature to starve to death and destroying it by giving it poison. An understanding of the action of thought on these bodies leads us to follow the general rule of overcoming any evil tendency or any failing by the steady practice of the opposite virtue. By carefully selecting the kinds of thought we wish to encourage, and practising them day by day, we can gradually build up an astral and a mental body which will vibrate to none but the purest and noblest thoughts, and thus we help ourselves more than we can do in any other way in the development of a pure character.

The thought-forms to which we have referred we find to be very real things, and to have a definite life of their own imparted to them by the thinker. Whenever we think we produce a vibration in the matter of the mental plane if the thought is purely intellectual, in the astral matter if it is purely associated with desire and emotion.

Most of our thoughts, however, are partly intellectual, partly emotional, so they produce vibrations in both kinds of matter. This vibration builds the matter into shapes, just as we have seen that the vibration of sound will build forms in lycopodium powder or some other light substance. If our thought is a vague, indefinite one, which has little force in it, and soon passes away, the form it builds has no vitality ; it is as vague and undefined as the thought, and quickly dissolves. But if our thought is full of intensity, if, for example, it is a strong desire, which we dwell upon and often repeat, then a clear, well-defined astral form is built up and is held together for a long while by the force of the thought. If it is a good pure desire, full of love, benevolence, aspiration, then the form built is of exquisite beauty, both in shape and colour ; while a thought of anger, jealousy, revenge, hatred, or any other evil passion, builds up a form hideous in its deformity. Not only so, but the form is animated by the energy of the thought, and its one strong tendency is to carry out the intention of the thinker. Thus a mother's love produces a beautiful thought-form, full of tenderness, ever hovering around her children, and by its subtle influence cheering them in sorrow, warning and protecting them in danger and temptation. Many a son in temptation is held back by some force he does not understand ; the thought of his mother comes into his mind suddenly, and with no apparent reason, for he has perhaps been thinking but little of her of late ; he feels as if she were actually by his side, and in her presence he cannot sin. Could he but

see, he would know that there is by his side an angel-form, created by her loving wishes and prayers, encircling him tenderly with its arms and drawing him away from the temptation into which he is about to fall. A thought of hatred, on the other hand, is a very demon of evil, filled with the desire to injure and destroy, and with the power, if not of destroying, at least of causing great discomfort and uneasiness to the one against whom it is directed. Thus we are ever peopling our own atmosphere either with angels of beauty and virtue, or with hideous demons of evil. If we could only see them ourselves, as some clairvoyants can do, the sight would make us pause before we think, and be careful to allow none but the best and purest thoughts to enter the mind! This is one cause of the instinctive feelings of attraction and repulsion that we sometimes experience on meeting people for the first time. Sometimes we meet an individual in whose presence we at once feel at ease; we feel happy to be near him, and, when he is by, all that is best and noblest in us is strengthened. We find it far easier to be good when he is near than at any other time. In the presence of some other person it is just the reverse. At our first meeting we feel uneasy, unhappy; he repels us, and his presence seems to intensify all the lower, evil tendencies of our nature. It is because in the first case we enter into an atmosphere peopled only by pure and beautiful forms, and they awaken corresponding thoughts in us; while, in the second case, the atmosphere is thick with ugly, evil forms, and they awaken in us all the wrong thoughts of which we are capable.

For thought has another important property besides this power of building forms, which also has its analogy in sound. If we take two tuning-forks, tuned to the same note, and place them at some distance apart; and if then we strike one of them, and stop its vibration after a few seconds, we shall hear the note sounding forth from the other, which has not been touched at all. The vibration of sound has travelled from the first tuning-fork through the air, and the vibrating particles of air striking against the second tuning-fork have caused it also to vibrate. Those who are acquainted with the elements of science will be familiar with this experiment, and will know that it will succeed only if the second fork is in unison with the first, or is one of its "harmonics"; because otherwise the rate of vibration transmitted to the second fork will be out of harmony, or *out of time*, with that at which alone it can vibrate, and so the two tendencies to vibrate will interfere with each other. Now thought acts in a similar way. Our mental and astral bodies are like musical instruments, each with its own particular range of notes or vibrations, depending on the kind of thoughts we have been in the habit of thinking. No doubt the range will be a very extensive one, and there will be a great many kinds of thoughts that belong in common to us all. At the same time, we know that there are thoughts of which some individuals are incapable. For instance, a very worldly-minded person is incapable of the thought of intense devotion and aspiration which would arise spontaneously in the mind of a religious devotee; speak to the former of the beauty of devotion and

worship, and there will be no response, because at present he has not built for himself astral and mental bodies which can vibrate at the rate belonging to such thoughts. There are some persons, on the other hand, who seem to be incapable of low or impure thoughts; they do not arise spontaneously in their minds, and if suggested to them, they are rejected instantly, and seem unable to make the least impression. With regard to purely intellectual thought, we find the same differences amongst people. Some are incapable of advancing beyond the merest rudiments of mathematics, even though they may have the best of teaching and of opportunities, while to others the subject, even in its most complex parts, does not present the least difficulty. If, then, one of us thinks a thought, say of fervent devotion, that goes forth as a vibration, spreading outwards in all directions. If it comes in the neighbourhood of another person whose mental and astral bodies are attuned to thoughts of devotion, that is, a person who is in the habit of thinking such thoughts, a responsive vibration is awakened, and a similar thought arises, apparently spontaneously, in the mind. Persons who are not naturally inclined to thoughts of devotion will not be affected by our thought, for it does not come within their range of vibration. Or, if one of us thinks a revengeful thought, that also will go forth as a vibration, in all directions, and is likely to awaken similar thoughts of revenge in the minds of those who are naturally inclined to be revengeful, though on those of opposite character it will not have the slightest effect. When we realise this wide-spreading influence of

thought, we begin to recognise how much greater our responsibility is than we are apt to think. We cannot any longer say, as sometimes we are tempted to do, that our thoughts at least are our own, and affect none but ourselves, so while we should certainly be careful about our words and actions, it does not matter so much about our thoughts. As a matter of fact, our thoughts are even less our own than either our words or our actions; for they travel to far greater distances from us, and their influence is not only far more widely spread, but is stronger, for it works directly on the minds of others. No crime is ever committed on the earth that we *may* not have made a little easier to do, if we have cherished thoughts of enmity, hatred, or violence. But, on the other hand, no deed of virtue or heroism is ever done that we may not have helped to bring about by our thoughts of love to others. At all times, for we are always thinking, we are either increasing the virtue of the world, or else adding to the evil that is in it.

These considerations suggest to us some ways in which we can help others. If we are in the midst of poverty and distress, and yet are not ourselves in a position to give much help, then by constantly sending out thoughts of love and desire to help, we shall set in motion vibrations which are likely to influence others who are in a better position than ourselves; and, at the same time, the love in our thoughts will create for those who are in distress an atmosphere of harmony which will make their sufferings easier to bear. If there is any great evil in the society in which we are living, or in

the nation to which we belong, then we can help to cure it in the same way that we can best cure our own failings, by continually sending out thoughts of an opposite character; these will give rise to similar thoughts in the minds of all those who are able to respond, and thus the tone of the society or nation will be gradually raised. Or we can utilise the power of thought in a rather more definite way. If we are in some assembly where discord arises, we may be able, by steadily thinking thoughts of peace and harmony, to lessen the discord, if not actually to quell it. Or if there is an individual who is in trouble, one who is striving with a temptation that he finds hard to overcome, or one who is in some sorrow or distress, we can help him by building round him an atmosphere of pure thought; either of strength and confidence in his own higher nature or of peace and trust in the love that is guiding our lives, according to the nature of the trouble; this will stimulate all that is best in him, and thus help him to help himself.

These uses of thought are closely connected with the force of prayer. It is often said that the study of Theosophy leads people to give up praying, as they lose their belief in a personal God, and therefore there is no one to whom they can pray. No greater mistake could possibly be made, for the study of Theosophy by no means makes us lose our belief in a personal God, if by "personal God" is meant a God who pours His own life into every form throughout the universe, who loves all the creatures He animates with His life, who ever

watches over the evolution of humanity, helping and guiding it, and leading men gradually nearer to Himself, and who manifests Himself to them from time to time that they may the more clearly see and understand the depth of His tenderness to them. It rather intensifies our belief in such a God, by giving us a reasonable explanation of some problems that would otherwise be inexplicable to many of us ; though, at the same time, it brings home to us the truth that this personal God is not the Absolute, the Infinite, but the *manifested* God. So there is surely no reason why we should cease to pray. But the nature of our prayer may be changed. If we believe, as we are taught in the course of our study, that all the outer conditions and surroundings of our lives are the outcome of our past, and are just what we most need to carry us forward in our evolution, then we shall not pray to God for any change in our outer life, or for any temporal blessings. For we shall know that He will give us through His messengers whatever is most conducive to our true progress, and instead of a petition, our prayer will become an outpouring of gratitude to Him for all that He sends us, whether of sickness or health, of adversity or prosperity, of sorrow or joy.

But petition for things that affect only the personality would be recognised by almost all earnest, thoughtful persons as being the lowest form of prayer ; and there are many who, without any study of Theosophy, have been led by their trust in God to give it up. It often happens, however, that such prayers meet with an answer, so that apparently God is influenced by them to give us

what we ask for. To some of us it seems more likely and more consistent with the wisdom of God that it is our own thoughts and desires that have set in motion agencies on the astral and physical planes that have brought us what we wish. Of course, this can only be if our past lives have rendered possible such gratification of our desires; otherwise the working out of the effects of past causes will interfere with the action of our thought. And hence it sometimes happens that most earnest prayers are apparently unheard. We soon find, however, that the gratification of these desires brings us no lasting happiness; indeed, it often leads instead to pain; and then we learn to be more careful as to what we pray for.

A higher form of prayer is the using of thought to build up character. We have already referred to this, and have seen how we can cure a wrong habit of thought by steadily practising a better one, and can overcome failings by practising the opposite virtues. We can add force to our effort to do this by devoting a little time every day to *thinking* or *meditating* on the virtue we want to cultivate, trying to understand what it is, and practising it in imagination. This is hardly prayer, strictly speaking, and yet it is really one of the forces that are brought into activity when we ask for the grace of God to help us to grow in virtue.

Both these forms of prayer can be used in helping others, as we have seen; but if we learn to be careful as to the temporal desires we indulge in for ourselves, we shall be still more so with regard to others, lest we

should, by the force of our thought, help to bring to them that which will cause pain rather than happiness. And in the effort to help them to develop purer characters, we shall be careful to confine ourselves to building an atmosphere of purity and love around them, in which the seeds of virtue in them may the better germinate and grow by their own inherent force, and not by the stimulus of our thought ; for we shall know that growth from within is more healthy than that which is forced from without.

But there is a far higher form of prayer than either of these ; it is worship, aspiration, the dwelling in thought on God, and the effort to open our hearts to His influence. It is for this that He has manifested Himself to man in various forms from time to time. A Sufi poet describes this prayer as erasing all else from the tablet of the heart, and then engraving the image of God upon it. It matters not which "image" we take, whether it be the Christ, Gautama the Buddha, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, or any other of the many forms in which God has manifested Himself. Whichever of them most strongly draws out our love and devotion, that is the one that should be engraved on the tablet of the heart, and then dwelling on that with love and reverence, the "windows of the soul" are opened, and the sunlight of God's love pours in. The divinity within reaches upwards towards the divinity that appears to be without, and in fervent devotion the heart is laid at the feet of the Lord. From such prayer as this we rise with added strength, added purity, for the streams of grace that are ever poured out by God have found an

entrance into our soul, and have brought to us their soothing and vitalising power. In this prayer we gradually rise out of ourselves, until, transcending all thought of self, we lose ourselves in our contemplation of the beauty and the love of God, and then we may become channels through which that love will reach the world.

One other use of thought remains ; a great deal has been both said and written of late years as to the influence of thought on the physical body, and it has been, and is, utilised by some for the curing of disease. There is no doubt as to the fact that diseases are sometimes both produced and cured by thought. In times of epidemic, for instance, it is those who continually dwell on the thought of it who most often fall a prey. On the other hand, cases have been known where some sudden danger to life, such as an outbreak of fire, has caused a paralytic, who may perhaps have been bedridden for years, to leap from his bed and even permanently recover the use of his limbs. But if thought is to be utilised for the curing of disease it must be done in a regular, systematic way ; and there are various methods which may be followed. One is to keep the mind filled with thoughts of health ; to think of oneself regularly and systematically as possessing a strong, healthy body, and never to allow the mind to dwell on any pain or sickness that may at any time affect the body. This is a perfectly natural method, and builds up around us a pure, healthy atmosphere, which must influence the bodily health. But many of us find we have too many other things to think about, which are of vastly greater importance than mere bodily health ; and

so, while we certainly do not let the mind dwell on any pain or sickness, we do not either let it dwell on the thought of health, but keep it occupied with higher concerns. Another method is to train the mind to realise that no pain or sickness can affect the real self, that it can touch only the body. And so some train themselves to think in the presence of any pain, "It is not I who suffer, but only the body; I remain unaffected, and can therefore be indifferent, whatever the body may suffer." This, again, is a perfectly true and natural method. But some go a step farther, and recognising that it is only the self that is permanent, that the body and all that affects it are transitory, say that there is no pain, no evil, that nothing truly exists except the self, and that the self is all good, pure, and healthy. This reminds us of the Eastern who says that "all is *Mâyâ*, illusion," and who sometimes, misunderstanding and misapplying a deep philosophical truth, reasons from that that he therefore need pay no attention to his daily duties, as they are but a part of the illusion in which he is involved. The principle is quite true; all *is* illusion, that is, all is transitory, impermanent; nothing is real, or permanent, save the self. But the "illusion" is at present the only means we have of expressing our consciousness, for we have not yet identified ourselves with the self; the physical body, transitory as it is, is the only instrument over which we have gained anything approaching control, and therefore to *us* at present it is a very important reality. Because we know it is not the self, we do not therefore refrain from feeding it when it is hungry, cloth-

ing it when it is cold, and, so long as we feel the necessity of doing this, so long is the body a reality to us, with all its limitations, and even with all its tendencies to pain. So we should temper our metaphysical philosophy with a little practical common-sense, and, instead of going to the extreme of denying the *present* existence of pain, should confine ourselves to the firm recognition of the impermanence of suffering, to the steady resolve to be unmoved by that which can touch only the body, and to continue the work that is given us to do in spite of bodily suffering. The *ignoring* rather than the *denying* of pain is the truly philosophical attitude. A third method is to train ourselves at regular intervals to meditate on the self, to "withdraw into the silence" of our own inmost being, and thus bringing ourselves into close communion with the divine, the universal, to draw thence all of strength and health that we need; to reach purity and health of body by means of purity of mind and development of the inner self. And surely, as the self grows in strength and purity, it will little by little assert its sway over the body, driving out from it all impure material, in which alone the seeds of disease can germinate and grow. But to develop the inner self *for the sake of bodily health* seems something like calling down fire from heaven to boil the kettle, instead of gathering sticks together and lighting a fire in the ordinary way; and one cannot help wishing that so noble and inspiring an attitude of mind had been called forth by a worthier motive. And yet it is perhaps better that a man should think purely and should cultivate the inner self for the sake of his bodily

comfort than that he should not do so at all. It marks one of the child-stages of the soul. A little child may need the promise of a pretty toy to persuade it to be good, and it is better that it should be good for the sake of the toy than not at all ; but soon it will recognise that the toy is worthless, and happy is it if it has by then learned the beauty of goodness, for it will then begin to be good for goodness' sake. So may the man who begins to cultivate the inner self for the sake of health ultimately find that bodily health also is but a toy, and is *as unreal* as bodily sickness ; but by that time he may have seen the beauty of the self, and then he will go on striving to develop it for its own sake. When we fully understand the position of the body as one of the instruments of the individuality, when we learn that all which affects the body, whether it be pain or the reverse, is an experience which can be utilised by the individuality, then alone will all these questions assume their true proportions ; and we shall then attain to that indifference which will enable us to accept all that comes to the personality with equal content, because we shall see in all alike an opportunity for growth.

In the meantime, it is impossible to attach too much importance to purity of thought ; and whatever be our motive, we should be careful to let our minds harbour none but pure thoughts, and then we shall be capable of none but pure words and actions, and shall become a part of that leaven of purity which shall ultimately leaven the whole mass of mankind.

CHAPTER X

THE LAW OF KARMA

EVERYWHERE in physical nature we see order and method; all natural activity can be grouped under certain laws, the Laws of Nature, and these work with unerring precision. If an apparent exception occurs, it is found on investigation to be the result of the intervention of some other law whose existence had been either unknown or overlooked. Foremost among the Laws of Nature is the Law of Cause and Effect; it, indeed, includes many other laws which are but the detailed workings of this great general principle. Every occurrence has its adequate cause; no cause ever comes into operation without being followed by its result. The chain of sequence is unbroken; everything that happens in nature is the result of some cause, and itself in turn becomes the cause of some future result. The same order and regularity is said to prevail in super-physical nature, and the Law of Cause and Effect, when extended to include all phenomena of intellectual and spiritual activity as well as of physical nature, is often spoken of as the Law of Karma, the word Karma meaning literally

"action" or "activity." It is especially in connection with the evolution of man that we need to study its working, as the understanding of it has an important effect on our practical life. But it is a very difficult and complex subject, and we cannot attempt to do more than indicate a few of the lines along which the Law acts.

We have already seen its working incidentally, when studying Reincarnation; we have seen that a man's character and the surroundings of his life are determined by his own actions in past lives; that, on his return to earth-life, the family and nation into which he comes, the kind of body with which he is provided, the environment in which he is to live, are the result of the character he has developed and of the responsibilities he has incurred towards others.

There are certain broad principles which are found to lie at the root of this general statement of Karma. It is sometimes said that good actions produce happiness, evil actions bring suffering; that is true so far as it goes, but when we recognise that good and evil are relative terms, we begin to need some more definite statement. Now the conditions of any single life may be grouped either under external conditions which include environment so far as causes of happiness are concerned, and opportunity so far as actions are concerned, or under internal conditions which include faculties or powers, and tendencies to action. There are many conditions that may at first seem to fall outside of these four classes, but probably all may ultimately be reduced to one of the four. It is impossible to say definitely what are the previous

causes that have given rise to these conditions, our knowledge is too limited, and the law is too complicated; besides, the causes are often so closely related to one another that one may greatly affect and modify the result of another. However, we can trace a few very broad lines of action.

In the first place, the causes of happiness must be earned, and the price paid will be of the same kind as that which is gained by it. Wealth, for instance, is earned by generosity in giving; if a man has in the past distributed to others, even though he had but little to give, that will bring him abundance in a future life; while a miser, hoarding his wealth and jealously guarding it from the use of others, is preparing for himself a life of poverty and penury. A man who is surrounded by friends who are ever ready to help and serve him has in the past gathered around him those whom he has helped and served; while a friendless man, who is shunned by all, has himself made his own surroundings by indifference and cruelty to others. One who is full of love to his relatives, and ever thinking of their welfare, is sowing the seeds whose rich harvest will be a home where he is surrounded by love. In short, if we desire any particular kind of environment, we can earn it by making the same kind of environment for others. This, we are told, is the law.

Opportunities are earned by effort. If a man wishes in the future to have opportunities for any particular class of action, then he must try to perform actions of the same sort in the midst of his present limited oppor-

tunities. One, for instance, who always seeks to impart to others the little knowledge he may have, is laying the foundation on which a future life of teaching may be built. He who is ever complaining that he has no opportunity of helping others has it in his power to make such opportunity if he helps the few, however few they may be, who are a little weaker and poorer than himself. When we see, as we sometimes do in the slums of our great cities, one who has barely enough to keep body and soul together, going about amongst those who are equally poor, sharing the last crust or the last penny, we cannot but rejoice at the glorious opportunities of charitable and philanthropic work that will open out when the causes that have led to the present surroundings are exhausted. And there is sometimes more real kindliness and charity beneath the rough and rugged exterior of these outcasts of humanity than in those who are generally accounted the leaders of society. And we sometimes wonder what will be the unhappy fate of those who, with ample opportunities of helping others, have too little energy and knowledge, or are too callous to suffering to take advantage of them. For just as opportunities grow by use, so do they die from neglect.

Faculties and powers also are earned by use and cultivation. If we wish to be great in any department of life, then we must begin practising at once. He who wishes to be a great artist must begin now to develop the little artistic faculty he possesses; he who would be learned must begin to learn now; he who would be great

as a politician must begin at once to study and mix in politics. Nothing can be had in the whole universe simply for the asking ; all must be worked for, the price for it must be paid. Whenever, therefore, it is stated that whatever we desire we shall ultimately have, it is implied that our desire is sufficiently keen and earnest to induce us to make some sacrifice for the attainment of our object ; and in that case we shall undoubtedly succeed.

Similarly with character ; it is now and here that we are building our character for the future. But in this respect we have perhaps the greatest freedom. For, as we have seen, thought is one of the strongest of forces ; and we can utilise it freely for the development of character, for though we cannot always act as we wish, we suffer from far less outward restraint with regard to our thoughts. And as tendency to action is the direct result of thought, we are in fact constantly sowing the seeds of our future actions.

Another broad principle is that the result of every action is twofold, first with reference to the action itself, secondly with reference to the motive that has prompted it ; and sometimes the effects of these two are opposite in character. The effect of the motive will show itself mainly in our tendencies and opportunities for action in a future life, the effect of the action itself in our outer circumstances ; and there is inevitably a constant interaction between these two. It will be clearer if we take a few concrete illustrations.

Suppose, first, that a man has an honest desire to

benefit and help another ; he is moved by a pure, good motive, having its basis in love. But his knowledge is limited, and, with the very best intentions, he does an action which brings suffering to the person he wishes to help. Now the loving feeling which prompted the action will tend to purify his character ; the habit of thinking loving thoughts will be strengthened, and his effort will bring him increased opportunities for loving actions in the future. Also his thought will have set up harmonious vibrations on the mental and astral planes, and these will draw to him harmonious and helpful influences from others. But through his lack of wisdom he has caused pain ; he has unwittingly sent out on the plane of action a force which tends to produce disharmony, and this will sooner or later rebound upon himself as pain, thus affecting his environment. It is probable, however, that he will gain much in wisdom, purity, and strength from this very suffering ; for the same tendency of character which prompted the good motive is likely to lead him to seek the lesson the pain is sent to teach. So he will be likely to avoid falling into a similar mistake in the future.

Suppose, however, that he has acted wisely, so that his action has brought help and happiness to the other. The effect of the good motive will remain the same, but there will be added to it physical happiness and prosperity as the result of the happiness he has caused. He will probably continue to use this prosperity for benefiting others, and will thus be constantly increasing both his own store of happiness and that of others.

Take the converse, the case of a man who acts from a base motive, either the desire to gain some benefit for himself, or, to take a more extreme case, the desire to injure another. But suppose that his action, nevertheless, brings happiness to another. The effect of it on the physical plane will be the same as if it had been prompted by a good motive; it will rebound on himself in the form of happy and prosperous surroundings. But the base thought which accompanied it will intensify his selfish or ill-natured tendencies, and thus he will in all probability use his very prosperity for doing harm instead of good to others. So the ultimate result will be suffering, as well as deterioration of character. Also the effect of his thought on the astral and mental planes will be inharmonious vibrations which will return to him as similar inharmonious influences, such as the absence of any true friends, or the ill-will of those he is associated with. If his action brings suffering to others, then the effect of the motive will remain the same, but instead of the happy and prosperous surroundings, which result in the first case, he will reap only pain and suffering.

Thus the motive and the action will bring about their appropriate results, independently of each other, but the character of the motive, which shows the true nature of the man, will determine the way in which he utilises the results of the action itself. If we try to apply this principle in greater detail, we shall be better able to understand why those of evil character are sometimes so prosperous, while those whose characters are noble and pure and loving are often surrounded by misfortune;

and we shall bear in mind that the prosperity of the wicked, being misused, will ultimately lead to pain, while to the pure and good even outer misfortune and suffering are but blessings in disguise, for they will ultimately lead to greater wisdom and therefore to greater happiness.

If we look, then, at a single life, it is clear that we are limited and confined within a comparatively narrow circle of necessity. Man has been compared to a bird confined in a cage ; it can hop about at will within the cage, but cannot pass between the bars ; so can man act freely within his circle of necessity, but he cannot pass outside of it. But the analogy is not quite complete ; to make it so, we must imagine that the bars of the cage are elastic, for though we can neither break nor pass beyond them, we can gradually expand them by a steady pressure from within, until at last our cage will have become as wide as the universe itself, when its bars will melt away and we shall be free. For it is we ourselves who have built the cage, and therefore it is we alone who can liberate ourselves ; but it has been many ages building, its bars are the work of hundreds of incarnations, and we cannot expect to undo in a single incarnation what has taken us so long to do. Hence we must be content to work slowly and patiently, recognising that we are not yet free, but that we may become so.

How, then, is our freedom to be attained ? To understand this, we must understand the nature of our bondage ; and, as we have seen, our circle of necessity consists of a physical environment which produces a

certain amount of happiness and of suffering, a number of opportunities of action and of progress, certain faculties and powers, emotional, intellectual, and moral, and a tendency to act in a particular way under given conditions. We have also seen how these have been brought into existence, and from that it is clear that the extent to which we can change them during a single life is in itself insignificant, but that we can set in motion causes which in future lives will bring about enormous results. For we can choose such lines of conduct as will produce in the future the environment we desire, we can utilise all the opportunities that offer themselves, in such a way as to select for the future only the opportunities we wish to recur, we can by cultivation and practice develop the faculties we wish, while by thought and effort we can build up the character we most desire and thus modify our tendencies to action. But it will be immediately objected that the desire and the power to do this are themselves the result of our past, so that they are really one of the elements that make up our circle of necessity; thus what looks like our freedom to stretch the bars of our cage is, after all, only a delusion. This leads us to consider what part the Self has to play in our growth, and that we can perhaps best understand by studying the various factors that enter into any single action.

We find, then, that every action begins with thought or desire, either awakened from without by some sensation-impulse or by a thought-impulse from another mind, or else prompted from within by the memory of some past experience, or, in a more advanced individual, by a

thought-impulse from the inner self, the divine spark in man. In a very undeveloped individual, as we have seen, the impulse of desire at once gives rise to action, without any reasoning upon it, and the result quickly follows in either pleasure or pain, the individual thus adding to his store of knowledge as to right and wrong. But the effect of the action does not end here; for every vibration in the subtle bodies tends to set up a habit, so that it becomes easier for that vibration to be repeated than for one of a different character to be set up. So that in a more advanced individual there are two factors to be considered, whenever an impulse to action arises; there is first the tendency or habit of the desire-body, which strongly prompts us either to yield to the impulse or to resist it; and there is, secondly, the action of the reason and conscience which warn us as to the rightness or otherwise of the action, and apparently impel us to act accordingly. But there is a third factor, of which we are not always fully conscious. This is the "will," which, properly speaking, is the energy of the Self, which, as it were, holds the reins of conduct. In the earliest stages, the Self leaves the desires free to act, for it knows that at that period the gratification of desire is good, as we have already seen. It remains inactive, the time not having yet come for it to assert itself. Hence it is that we mistake desire for will, and when we see an individual eagerly and energetically pursuing desire, we sometimes say that he is "strong-willed"; as a matter of fact, his will has not yet begun to assert itself, he is simply the slave of desire. But as soon as the reason begins to

develop, then has come the time for the will to assert itself, and slowly and gradually, but surely, it begins to rein in the desires and subject them to the reason. This is the impelling force which we invariably feel when the voice of conscience speaks. The conscience only indicates the right, it is the will that urges us to obey. It is at this stage that conflict begins, for the desires are like a spirited horse that rebels against the restraining hand of the driver. Our consciousness is still identifying itself with the desire-nature, and thus at first we oppose the will, not knowing that it is the true self. But after a while we find that obedience to the will brings a truer happiness than the gratification of the desires, and then the consciousness begins to reach upwards and at times succeeds in identifying itself with the will. Then it oscillates backwards and forwards between the life-side (the energy of the self, or the will), and the form-side (the energy of desire), and this oscillation produces a feeling which makes us almost imagine that we are threefold in nature, consisting of a higher and lower nature, the former ever drawing us upward, the latter ever tending outwards or perhaps downwards, towards form, and also a certain something which is ever swaying backwards and forwards between the two, and which we feel to be *ourself*, and to have the power of choosing between the other two. The feeling is illusory, but we must recognise that so long as we are in a world of illusion, the very illusions are to us realities ; and therefore we may, for all practical purposes, regard ourselves as possessing this threefold nature. Then we

find that the problem of freeing ourselves from the bondage of Karma reduces itself to identifying ourselves with the Self, whose energy we see to be the true will. For the Law of Karma is limited in its scope; all manifested forms are under its sway; the personality, the human ego that goes on from incarnation to incarnation, both these are subject to it. But the Self, the eternal "witness," which sits ever unmoved while the conflict is raging around it, *that* is not touched by Karma, nay, it is the lord of Karma, and therefore ever free. The *will*, then, is already free, but *we* can be free only when we identify ourselves with the will, and ultimately with the Self. In other words, while Karma binds us, there is in the Self the energy which will liberate us from our bondage.

But to make this possible we must first recognise that the Self *is* free, that we really are the Self, and that in it resides all power, because it is one with the Universal Self. The great teachers of all times have taught us this; again and again have Their voices rung out: "Children of God, remember your divinity; believe in it not only with your lips, but with your hearts; recognise your own freedom, and strive to live in it, and then you will find that gradually the chains will be loosened, and will drop away from you."

"Ho! ye who suffer! know
Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels,
None other holds you that ye live and die,
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
Its spokes of agony,
Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness."¹

¹ *Light of Asia*, Sir Edwin Arnold, p. 217 (Lotos Series).

But alas ! we believe not that we are free, and thus we slacken our efforts and fall back into the bondage of desire, blinding ourselves again and again with the mists of illusion, until at last the pain of the darkness gradually causes us to open our eyes to the illusion, and when it has once been truly seen, we are no longer so faint-hearted and weak of purpose in our efforts to reach the Self.

For we shall find that every effort meets with a response. Whenever the voice of conscience speaks, and the will urges us to act, then as soon as we put out our energy to obey, we find that an accession of strength immediately follows ; the effort has opened the door, and the Self is able to act in us. And so, coming back to the original question, we see that the very fact that we feel we can choose between the higher and the lower nature is a sign that the Self has begun to make itself felt, and needs only the responsive effort on our part to be able to guide us in action. So long as we are not conscious of a power of choice, we have none, nor do we wish for it, for the Self is still inactive ; so soon as we feel the power of choice, then it is indeed ours, for the Self is beginning to act, and calling to us to recognise it as our true Self.

The objection sometimes brought against the Law of Karma, that it is identical with fatalism, is thus seen to have no solid foundation. Certainly it is not possible to avoid the consequences of our past ; they must inevitably work themselves out. If we throw a stone from our hand, we cannot call it back ; it must, in accordance with

the laws of dynamics, reach a certain point; and if we have aimed it in such a way that it strikes the window of our neighbour's house, we are not so foolish as to say that we were "fated" to break his window. We recognise that it was the fault of our aim, and we learn to aim better another time. But we can utilise this very inviolability of the law to modify the effects of the past. If we exert a force on any physical body which causes it to move in a given direction, nothing can undo the effect of the force, and the body will continue to move in that direction until the force is exhausted by friction or in some other way. But while it is still moving, we can bring another force to bear on it, and it will then move neither in the direction of the old force, nor in that of the new, but in a direction between the two, which is technically called the resultant of the two forces. To express it accurately, if a parallelogram be drawn of which two adjacent sides represent the two forces, in direction and in intensity, then the diagonal of the parallelogram which passes through the angle formed by the two sides will represent both the direction and the intensity of the resultant force. The original force has not been destroyed, it is still exerting its full effect; but that effect is shown no longer simply in determining the direction of motion, but in modifying the effect of the new force. It is just the same with Karma. Our past actions and thoughts correspond to the original force, our present tendencies to the direction in which the body is moving, while the new force is the action of the will. We cannot undo the past; it must bear its full fruit; but we can

modify its effects. And the original Karma will then show itself no longer as definite tendencies, but rather as a resistance to what would otherwise have been the full effect of the new Karma. Suppose, for instance, that we had seriously injured another person in a past life, so arousing strong feelings of antagonism; we meet him again in the present life, and find him our bitter enemy. This is the direct working out of Karma, and cannot be escaped. But we can set an opposite force to work; we can constantly send out thoughts of love to him, can seek opportunities of serving him, and in every way treat him with affection and friendship, until by our love we break down his enmity and thus neutralise the effect of the past injury. We have not in this way prevented the past Karma from having its full effect; the thoughts of love have had to be utilised in breaking down enmity; whereas, if we had not committed the injury in the past, they might have built up a very strong bond of friendship between us, instead of merely making our enemy neutral. If we follow up this line of thought, we shall see that, as a general rule, Karma never compels us to a certain action; it may, and does, make certain actions far easier for us to do than any others; it gives a strong *tendency* to action, but until the action is actually done, it is possible for one who has a little knowledge, and in whom the Self has begun to assert itself, to prevent the action by bringing a new force to bear.

If we could but realise this, our lives would be spent to better purpose. Suppose, for example, that we are conscious of some failing which we desire to overcome,

but we feel as if the habit we have formed were too strong for us. We make the effort to resist, but we fail. We strive again, and yet again, but each time again we fail. If we do not understand the action of the will, we may despair and give up the attempt. But if we understand, then it will not matter how often we fail, we shall each time gather our energies together again, and courageously continue the fight; for we shall know that the Self is stronger than the form, and that it is gradually undermining the habit; that, though there may be no apparent success, yet each effort will bring us a little nearer to success; we do not perceive the approach until we have actually attained, for even at the very last step we fall, and it seems to us to be a failure. But the energy of the habit is all the time being gradually exhausted by the force of the will until at last we succeed, and are then surprised to find that even the attraction of the habit is overcome. When we have once experienced this, never again can we sit down hopelessly and say: "It is our Karma, it is useless to struggle." Rather shall we put forth our strongest efforts, confident in the certainty of the Law and the divinity of the Self.

Or, if we see another suffering, we shall not be tempted to say, as some have said: "It is his Karma; therefore it is not for us to interfere, he must be left to suffer." We shall rather see in his suffering an opportunity, given to us by our Karma, of helping him, and we shall use it with our utmost power, knowing that to him it cannot fail to bring help, for if the time has not yet come when the suffering may pass, at least our sympathy

will make it easier to bear, and will help to strengthen the activity of the Self in him; while to ourselves it will bring us in the future increased opportunities both of giving and of receiving help.

Another objection sometimes brought against the Law of Karma is that it is cold and unfeeling, and leaves no room for the mercy of God and for forgiveness of sins. If by forgiveness is meant an arbitrary releasing of man from an equally arbitrary punishment for the sins he has committed, there is certainly no room for that in a world where the Law of Karma prevails. Or if by forgiveness is meant an excusing of the natural consequences of sin, for that also there is no room. It would be no *loving* God who would dispense such forgiveness to His creatures, for then what sense of security would there be in respect to any of our actions? We should feel we were living in a world of chaos, instead of a world of order; and we should have no heart to go on striving, for we should never know whether any action would bring its natural result or not. Those who believe in this kind of forgiveness seem to ignore the fact that if a wrong action can fail of its result, it is equally possible that our efforts for good may also fail. But if by forgiveness is meant a drawing nearer of man to God, then surely the Law of Karma in no way interferes with that; it rather helps us to work systematically in order to come nearer to God; and on His side there can be no need of what we ordinarily term forgiveness, for He is ever drawing us towards Himself. But we shall revert to this point in a subsequent chapter. As for the mercy of God, those who

really understand the working of Karma will surely recognise in the law itself the very means by which He is ever pouring His mercy upon us; for experience and suffering are, as we have seen again and again, the best or only methods by which we can learn and grow.

We shall then be able to take our own suffering with content and patience, and all the more so because we shall recognise that it is the price we are paying for suffering that we ourselves have caused to others in the past, and that it gives us at the same time an opportunity of learning deeper sympathy with those who suffer.

It matters not to what details of our life we apply our knowledge, we shall find that in all, the recognition of the Law of Karma, together with the freedom of the will, brings us content, peace, hopefulness, and courage, together with the comforting assurance that, living in a world of law and order, under a reign of eternal and unanswering justice, no act, no effort, can ever be wasted, each will bear its full fruit, and lead us unerringly to our goal.

CHAPTER XI

THE BROTHERHOOD OF HUMANITY

THERE is at the present day a tendency in many directions to recognise the necessity of realising the brotherhood of man. Philanthropists, socialists, followers of religion, reformers of all classes, all alike feel that the lack of brotherhood is the main cause of all present evils, and that, could a brotherhood of humanity be once established, then, at least, the worst of these evils would be quickly removed. Many attempts are made to establish such a brotherhood, but they meet with but little success; for constantly the selfishness, or the folly, of the many ruins the best-laid plans of the few who are inspired by a genuine love for their fellows. We must try, then, to understand the basis of human brotherhood in order that we may the better see the cause of the failure, and then each will be able to determine for himself the best means of avoiding or overcoming it.

In studying the constitution of man we see how the real Self is a ray from the divine, from the Universal Self, so that *in the Self* there is unity; but that separateness

is the result of all manifestation. The separateness, then, that we feel amongst ourselves does not belong to the Self, but to the manifestation of it; or, in other words, it is the forms which limit us that are the cause of the feeling of separateness, and if only we could raise our consciousness above them, we should then feel the unity. But we have also seen that, as it is through the form that all experience comes to us, we have come to identify ourselves with it, so that to many it seems to be the only reality. So long as this is the case, we shall not be able to feel the unity of the Self, and the realisation of brotherhood in its fulness will not be possible. At first it seems as if the physical body were the reality; but in time we rise above that, and recognise that it is but a temporary instrument. Our life next seems to be centred in our desires; with many this is even yet the case, and their consciousness is really working chiefly in the desire-body; it is with that they are identifying themselves, though they are not conscious of the fact, because at present our understanding of the working of consciousness is so imperfect. But we learn in time that reason is superior to desire, and should always control it, and then we begin to identify ourselves with the mind. The consciousness is then working mainly in the mental body; we are still limited by the form and still conscious of separateness, and not of unity. At the same time, the conflict of interest is far less than before. For, while on the one hand food, wealth, and all kinds of earthly fortune are limited in quantity, so that the more one enjoys of them, the less will be left for others; on the

other hand, not only are the pleasures of art, poetry, philosophy, and all intellectual pursuits unlimited, but the very enjoyment of them by one will often increase the supply for others. Conflict thus becomes less and less as we raise our consciousness step by step, and thus we make possible by slow degrees that ultimate realisation of the Self in which all separateness will cease, for we shall know that men are not only brothers, but are all one in essence.

Thus the brotherhood of man is not something which needs to be established ; it already exists, and needs only to be realised. But we can realise it only as in the course of evolution we rise to higher planes ; for on the lower there must always be a sense of separateness and a conflict of interest. At first this discourages us, for evolution works very slowly. But, though the perfect realisation of brotherhood is at present unattainable, we can hasten it by altruism. There is, of course, no such thing as altruism on the highest planes ; for when the unity of the Self has once been seen, what room is there for even the thought of the *alter* ? Then only shall we fully understand what Jesus meant by His command : "Thou shalt love thy neighbour *as thyself*." Until we can reach that stage, the best we can do is to remember that we are all the children of one Father, and therefore that, even at our present stage, we are brothers in reality and not merely in theory.

But as, remembering this, we strive to practise altruism, we need to remember also that men are brothers of very different ages. Some are very young in their evolution ;

they have lived fewer lives than others, and have therefore gained less experience ; their character is less developed. Others are far advanced in evolution, they have lived more lives ; indeed, they had doubtless been evolving for ages before the youngest members of the human family had even begun their evolution. It is on this truth that the differences amongst the various castes or classes of society rest. It is with the brothers of humanity as with those of a family in a single incarnation ; each age has its own special characteristics, its own occupations, its own duties and responsibilities, its own ideals. Equality will thus be an impossibility ; even equal opportunities for all will be impossible in a single lifetime ; for we have seen that our present opportunities are regulated by our past thoughts and actions, that they are subject to the Law of Karma, and therefore cannot be the same for all. If we could see the whole series of incarnations through which individuals have to pass, then, no doubt, we should see that, in the long run, all really have equal opportunities, and that the differences which grieve and pain us so much now are only the inevitable result of difference in the stage of development during a single incarnation. Much of the disappointment of reformers, heart-breaking as it has sometimes been, would have been avoided if the facts of Re-incarnation and Karma had only been known to them.

In our efforts to help others, then, we shall have to be guided by this principle of the inequality of development, as the younger brothers will need entirely different help from those who are a little older. We shall also need to

remember that helping the body of a man does not always really help the man himself ; and it is far more important that we should help our brother to grow than that we should save his body from a little pain and suffering. When we try to apply these two principles, we find that comparatively little can be done by dealing with people in large masses, as is sometimes attempted by extensive schemes for social reform. Not that they are useless ; far from it. A great deal of relief is given by them, for the strain of the difficult environment by which some human beings are surrounded is lessened, or even for a time removed ; probably only a few will be able to take advantage of this temporary relief, but the few who are thus able will take a step forward and will grow a little stronger in themselves, so that when the strain returns, as it almost certainly will, they will not be so much overwhelmed by it. Environment is of our own making ; but at the same time there is a constant interplay between environment and character. Character is growing under the surface even when the environment seems the most hostile ; and if the growth has reached a certain point, then the removal of the strain enables the hidden growth to manifest itself, and a step forward is taken outwardly. If the growth has not reached this point, there is no apparent result from the removal of the strain, and the individual slips back unchanged into the old environment. It depends then on the stage reached by the individual whether or not he is able to take advantage of outer relief.

But there is another use of these extensive schemes of

reform. They do much towards the educating of public opinion. They bring more vividly home to the minds of men the state of suffering in which their brethren are living, and help those who are more fortunate to realise their own responsibility to the less fortunate. It may be that only a few will be affected, and moved to make efforts to relieve others. But that does not matter ; if only one is so influenced, that will bring into activity another centre from which forces will go out that tend towards unity, and so will bring a little nearer the time when all men are able to realise a more perfect brotherhood. The thought forces, too, of sympathy and love, which accompany every effort towards social reform, will act on the mental plane, creating an atmosphere in which it is easier for the spirit of altruism to grow amongst men.

It seems probable, however, that the greatest amount of good, and the most permanent, will be done by the efforts made to help individuals. It requires far more patience and more unselfishness, for it is generally done unseen and unrecognised by men, and often is even met with ingratitude and misunderstanding on the part of the one we try to help. But to the one who really loves his fellow-beings this does not matter. He tries to study each individual who is in need of help ; to see what is his ideal, and then to show him how he can advance towards it, while at the same time placing before him one which is slightly higher. In this way he helps him from within, he shows him how he may help himself, and, by the power of his loving sympathy, gives him greater courage and strength to do so. This will accelerate the growth

of the individual, and will sooner or later react on his circumstances; for all circumstances yield to us the moment we have outgrown them.

As we grow to understand more and more clearly the nature of this brotherhood, our attitude towards our duties in life changes. We no longer look at our occupation or profession merely as a means, and often an unpleasant one, of earning our livelihood. It becomes far more than that; a sacred duty, in fact. For we learn to think of ourselves not as isolated units living each for himself, but as members of the great family, living and working for the benefit of the whole. Our work is then the contribution made towards the prosperity and happiness of the family by one of the brothers composing it. Our attention is thus diverted from the "profitableness" of our work to its actual usefulness; we begin to do it in a spirit of love, because the great human family is in need of it. Then we no longer regard one kind of work as noble, another as ignoble; there is nothing menial, for all loving service is beautified and ennobled by the spirit that prompts it. No longer then can we scorn or despise a fellow-worker, thinking his work to be less worthy than ours. Rather shall we think all the more lovingly of the humblest among the workers, just because they are doing the more difficult or the more unpleasant work, and that which brings them less praise or renown than perhaps ours is doing. Our views of life will be indeed reversed in almost every particular. The youngest and least developed of our brothers will be the objects of our tenderest care and most unwearying patience; though we

may need at times to restrain their waywardness for the protection of others, the restraint will be accompanied by a heart so full of love that it will no longer rouse the bitter antagonism it does now, but little by little the young soul will open in the atmosphere of love, until at last it begins to recognise that obedience to the law is sweeter than waywardness. But all this must be a matter of growth; it is an ideal towards which we may all aspire and strive. We shall not reach it yet, but we may begin consciously to travel towards it, and we cannot even do that until we have recognised the beauty of the ideal.

There is another point of view from which we can regard the brotherhood of man. Not only has it its basis in the spiritual unity of man, but it also rests on the close association that there is amongst individuals, and the interaction of one with another. In studying the Law of Karma we confined our attention to the action of the law in connection with individuals, individual Karma. But there is also what may be called the collective Karma of groups of individuals. We are continually influencing those with whom we associate, not only by our words and actions, but also by our thoughts, and as this tends to draw us together again to discharge the responsibilities we have thus incurred, our Karma becomes closely interwoven with theirs. The association may be slight, and therefore the responsibility correspondingly so, or it may be discharged immediately that it is incurred; much of our association with others is of this nature. But if there is even a very slight

responsibility left undischarged, it will necessitate a further association, and this may again bring additional responsibility. So that in some cases there is a somewhat complicated interblending of Karma, which may continue life after life. We shall be in turn influenced by these others, and our connection with them may draw them into the troubles that fall upon us, or may draw us into their troubles; we may share their joys, they may share ours. Whenever we feel then, as we sometimes do, that we are suffering through the fault of another and not through our own, we may remember that this is the result of past responsibility and interweaving of our Karma. And, moreover, we learn by degrees that it depends entirely on ourselves whether we allow the actions of others to cause us to suffer or not; every *feeling* of suffering is due to our own ignorance and lack of development, for if we realised the whole purpose of life, and understood its working, we should then be able to see behind the suffering and rejoice in the opportunity for growth. The interweaving of Karma extends beyond mere groups of individuals. For the whole of the class of society to which we belong is, to a certain extent, influenced by us. The tone of society is the sum total of the characters of those composing it, so that if an individual grows better, that will do something, infinitesimally small perhaps, but still something, to improve the tone of society. This effect works through the power of thought more than in any other way, by the strong influence our thoughts have on others. And it is not confined even to the class of society to which we

belong. In a small measure, the whole of humanity is being influenced by the thoughts of the individuals composing it, no one of whom can slip a step backwards without, to some extent, weakening the whole, for he is adding to the force of the downward tendencies; no one can rise a step higher without lifting humanity, if ever so little, towards greater strength and purity.

We can thus none of us live only to ourselves, we are ever living in and for others, whether consciously or not. To attempt to do otherwise, as indeed men are constantly attempting, is somewhat like the action of the various limbs of the body in the old fable, when they rebelled against the stomach, and refused to work for so lazy an organ. Like them, we also find only increased weakness and suffering when we try to live each for himself. For we are parts of a brotherhood, existing at this very moment, each portion of it being dependent on other portions, influencing them and being in turn influenced by them. It rests with us to decide whether we will help to make that brotherhood one in which each is striving for himself at the expense of the rest of the family, or one in which each is striving to work for the good of the whole, until perfect order, peace, and harmony shall prevail.

CHAPTER XII

THE RELATION OF THEOSOPHY TO CHRISTIANITY

It has been thought and said by many that Theosophy is opposed to Christianity, and even that, if a person should be a member of the Theosophical Society, he could not consistently be at the same time a Christian. The last statement is manifestly untrue, for the Society has nothing to do with dogmas and creeds, requiring from its members only an adherence to the principle of brotherhood, than which there could hardly be anything more consistent with true Christianity. What is meant, however, is probably that if a man believes in the teachings that a comparative study of religion leads many of the members of the Society to accept as true, he cannot at the same time be an "orthodox" Christian. It will be well, then, to take the fundamental doctrines of "orthodox" Christianity, and see how far they are in accord with the results so far advanced of such comparative study. We are met, however, by a serious difficulty, for we find that there is by no means unanimity of opinion as to what "orthodox" Christianity really is! But there are a few doctrines that are accepted by the vast majority of those

who call themselves "orthodox," so we can confine our attention to them. The Fatherhood of God, the Divinity of Christ, the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Atonement are perhaps the most essential; the immortality of the soul is practically assumed in these, and as it is taught in all the great religions in one form or another, we shall not need to consider it separately.

If we try to analyse what is really involved in the belief in the Fatherhood of God, we find two main thoughts, that we have our origin in Him, and that He loves us and guides us and draws us to Himself as a father draws his children around him in love and trust. Of the Absolute, the Infinite, this cannot be either affirmed or denied, for, as we have seen, That is beyond our comprehension, and of It we cannot speak. But of the Logos, the Source and Sustainer of the Universe, the Manifested God, it can surely be affirmed with the deepest truth. For we have seen how He has poured forth His life into every form in the Universe, how in each of us He has planted a seed, a germ of His own life, how He is guiding us on through all the experiences of our many incarnations, teaching us now by love, now by pain when we turn a deaf ear to the voice of love, but ever teaching with infinite tenderness and patience; how He not only manifests Himself ever through His works, but how from time to time He sends into the world special manifestations of Himself the Avatâras, in order that they, showing forth the fulness of His love, may draw us the nearer to Him, and how the goal which He has placed before us is that we may at last be "one with

Him," and enter into the fulness of His joy. What more perfect and more beautiful fatherhood can there be than that? It is indeed an even closer tie than fatherhood, for He is within as well as around us, we are not only His children, but a very part of His being.

All that is essential, then, in the Fatherhood of God is not only retained in the light of the comparative study of religions, but it rather acquires a deeper and richer significance; it draws us even nearer to God than before, and fills us with a yet deeper reverence and love for Him. Further, we have seen how there are some problems which, in the light of Christianity alone, are difficult, if not impossible, to solve, and raise questions in the hearts of some as to whether the Fatherhood of God can be true, for they seem to cast doubts on the perfection of His justice and love. But in the light of Reincarnation these find an easy and reasonable solution; thus this teaching alone greatly strengthens our belief in the Divine Fatherhood.

Passing on to the divinity of Christ, we see that the fundamental teaching of religion is the essential divinity of man, by virtue of his being a germ of the life of God; and we have tried to form some idea of the wonderful heights to which man is able to rise when, having controlled his lower nature, and realised his divinity, he becomes "one with the Father." It is not necessary for us to discuss the exact position that had been reached by the Christ; we have seen that there are grades even amongst those Great Ones who have transcended what we know as humanity. We may think of Him as a

Master, we may think of Him as an Avatâra, it matters not;¹ but in whatever particular way we may regard Him, He will be to us the perfect type of humanity, the Divine man, for He is one who through long ages in the past has risen step by step, life after life, until He now stands at the summit of the mountain we are beginning to climb; He has realised the divinity we are but beginning to feel faintly stirring within us. The miraculous element in His divinity is removed, but the divinity itself remains untouched. Also its uniqueness is removed, for we find that there are other great Teachers who occupy a similar position to His. But this surely in no way lowers His position; we shall not say He is less great because others may be equally great. Rather does it raise our conception of God and fill us with yet deeper love and reverence; for we see that He has not limited Himself to *one* revelation, made less than two thousand years ago; but that He has revealed Himself to man, from the earliest dawn of time, now in one form now in another. And if this teaching affirms the divinity of every man, that also in no way lowers the position of Christ, nor is it in any sense an attempt to make ourselves equal with Him, for He has attained what we are feebly and blindly groping after, He is at the point which it will take us many, many incarnations, many ages perhaps, to reach.

It is this teaching as to Christ that brings Him so

¹ Those who wish to study in greater detail the position occupied by Jesus of Nazareth, or the Christ, are referred to Mrs Besant's *Esoteric Christianity*.

close to us in our daily life. We feel that He has passed through all the troubles and trials and difficulties that beset us; He has the most complete sympathy with them all, for He has been through them all, He knows them all by His own experience. He has felt the loneliness, the helplessness, the despair, that we sometimes feel. He has felt, as we sometimes do, that the burden of life is almost too heavy to be borne. But He has risen above it all, He has fathomed the mystery of life. He knows what is the meaning of all the sorrow and pain and despair that so often oppress us. And so with the same intense sympathy, compassion, and love, that brought Him back to earth to help us, after He had won the victory, does He still help each of us that will open our hearts to receive His help, and lead us on to the bright future which He has Himself reached, and which He knows is in store for us.

Were it not so, His promise to His followers: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,"¹ would lose half its meaning.

It is argued, however, by many Christians that if we deny the uniqueness of Christ's divinity, we shall undermine the whole Christian position; for Christianity rests, they say, on His being the "only Son of God," the one by whom *alone* men can be saved and come to the Father. But *does* true Christianity really rest on this basis? is it supported by the teachings of Christ Himself? or is it a doctrine that has grown up subsequently to the time of Christ, and may therefore be tinged with

¹ St Matt., v. 48 (Revised Version).

the imperfect understanding of His followers? Indirectly this question involves another, that, namely, of the inspiration of the Bible. Are we to regard that book as directly inspired by God in its entirety, or not? The Higher Criticism has already answered that question, and shown that the different books composing it are by no means equal in authority, and also that their origin is not in all cases what it has popularly been supposed to be. Thus the Christian, unless he closes his ears against all newly-discovered knowledge, can no longer regard the Bible as verbally and literally inspired; he is obliged to take some account of its historical origins. To the student of Theosophy, independently of the Higher Criticism, the inspiration of the Bible takes on a new aspect. For he learns to regard the sacred Scriptures of all religions as inspired in the sense that they are given to the world through the sages who through their purity are better able to perceive truth than other men. But as even the sages may not yet be perfect in knowledge, and as those through whom they hand on their teaching generation after generation are still less so, he realises that there will be in all Scriptures a *human* element which will be imperfect and only partially true. Add to this what we have already seen, that much of the teaching is given under an allegorical form, or in symbols, so that only those who are advanced enough to be able to understand will see the inner meaning. Then we readily recognise that in all sacred Scriptures we must learn to discriminate between the human and the divine element, and that we must seek for the inner meaning, and not be

satisfied with what appears on the surface. Applying this to the Christian teaching as to Jesus being the "only Son of God," we find that He made no such claim, it was what His followers claimed for Him. But He did state on more than one occasion that none could come to the Father save through Him. We find, however, that the great Teachers of other religions claimed that man could reach God through themselves. Sri Krishna, for instance, often speaks in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* of the worship of Himself as being the highest that men can perform, and as leading them to peace. He claims that by Him "all this world is pervaded,"¹ speaking of Himself as if He were actually God; and speaking of those who worship "other Gods," He says, "Any devotee who seeketh to worship with faith any such aspect, I verily bestow the unanswering faith of that man."² And again: "Even the devotees of other Gods, who worship, full of faith, they also worship Me, though contrary to the ancient rule."³ Again, just as the Christ teaches that whoever believes on Him shall be saved and have everlasting life, so does Sri Krishna teach that, "Even if the most sinful worship Me, with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved; speedily he becometh dutiful, and goeth to eternal Peace."⁴ Many more similar passages might be quoted, but these will suffice to show that if Christ claimed to be the Saviour of men, claimed that through Him alone could men reach God, Sri

¹ *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, ix. 4.

² *Ibid.*, ix. 23.

³ *Ibid.*, vii. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ix. 30, 31.

Krishna's claims were no less, for He even goes so far as to claim that even though men worship other Gods, yet they are really worshipping Him, without knowing it. Now, if we take these teachings literally, and as if referring in each case to the *man* who spoke them, we are on the horns of a dilemma; for we shall have to regard one or the other as speaking falsely, and no pious Christian will allow this with regard to Christ, any more than any devout Hindu will admit it with regard to Sri Krishna. It is difficulties of this kind that compel a student of Theosophy to look beneath the surface, and he then finds that it is far more reasonable to believe that these phrases do not refer at all to the *men* who uttered them, but that They were speaking of that which They came to manifest to men, and identified Themselves with that because it was through Them that it was known to men, through Christ to some of the men of the West, through Sri Krishna to some of the men of the East; while to other men there were other teachers again who occupied a similar position. And as we study more deeply, we find that the revelation They made to man was twofold. First They revealed to him the Love-aspect of God, the second person of the Trinity, the "Son of God" of the Christian, the Vishnu of the Hindu. Secondly, they revealed to him the presence of the God within himself, the Christos of the Gnostic School, the Átman of the Hindu, the Higher Self of the student of Theosophy. And then we see how in each case it is through that revelation alone that man can be "saved." Nothing can draw him to God save the love

of God ; but it is *the same* love whether manifested through Jesus the Christ, through Gautama the Buddha, or through Krishna the Beloved ; and therefore the "saving power" is but one, though the channels through whom it flows to the world may be many. But it does not reach the heart of man till he also begins to recognise his divinity ; the Christos, the Higher Self, of each one must respond to the love of God before he can recognise the Father who is drawing him to Himself.

This thought leads us to the meaning of the atonement and the forgiveness of sins. For when we begin to catch even a faint glimpse of the infinite tenderness and patience of the Father, working through all stages of the evolution of His universe, how *can* we associate with Him the thought of wrath, how *can* we believe that He needs that His wrath and vengeance should be turned aside from His erring children, and above all by the death of one so pure, so sinless, as Jesus of Nazareth ? As long as we believe that, it is because we do not yet believe in the love of God ; ignorance or prejudice has so blinded us that we see His love through our own imperfections, and ascribe to Him emotions which would be foreign to the nature of even a pure and loving, though imperfect, man. No, there is no barrier on God's side to separate us from Him, it is only we who have built up walls around ourselves that shut out the radiance of His love. As Giordano Bruno says, "The human soul has windows, and it can shut those windows close. The sun outside is shining, the light is there unchanging ; open the

windows, and the light of the sun streams in.”¹ The love of God is ever shining all around us, but if we close the windows of our soul, it cannot penetrate into our hearts. And so there is need of an at-one-ment ; there is need of a reconciliation between man and God, but the need is entirely on man’s side, and not on God’s. And in many ways does Christ become such an atonement. By His purity and love, by the gratitude inspired by His sacrifice for man, He awakens in them a responsive love, and through that leads them to appreciate the love of the Father. To some it is the beauty of His life, as He “went about doing good,” that most strongly awakens love ; to others it is the suffering of His death, for to them it seems a greater sacrifice to suffer the sharp pain and the ignominy of His death on the cross, than to suffer what, in the opinion of many, must have been the long slow pain of living. For to Him physical life was nothing but limitation ; He came back to the prison-house of flesh when He had nought to gain from it ; and so to some it seems as if the sacrifice of His life was far greater than that of His death. But to all in whom there is a living spark of the divine, even though it be but faintly glowing, there is some aspect either of His life or of His death, which stirs up the feeble flame and makes it burn a little more brightly. Thus it is by what He is able to do for the heart of man *from within* that He brings about the true atonement which makes the divinity within man feel out towards the divinity beyond him. Then there arises in the heart a deeper sense of

¹ Quoted in *Esoteric Christianity*, A. Besant, p. 225.

the evil of disobedience to the divine laws, a stronger impulse to do right begins to guide the life, and as the steady effort towards good is made, there comes into the heart a feeling of peace that was not there before. It is the opening of the "windows of the soul" that has allowed it to enter, and to man it appears as though God had forgiven his sins, for he does not yet fully understand that the change is in himself alone. The sense of estrangement between man and God thus passes away, and so the teacher Christ has, by the power of His love in awakening the love of man, become the atonement between man and God.

But there may be some in whom the spiritual fire is not yet even glowing as a feeble spark. In them it may well be that neither the beauty of His life, nor the purity of His character, nor the tenderness of His love, will awaken any real response. They may admire, but they will not be touched. They need not necessarily be sunk in sin; indeed, the probability is that they are not. For sin brings with it the suffering that is at once its result and its cure. He who has deeply sinned and keenly suffered is on the way towards experiencing the hunger of the soul that yearns after forgiveness; and to such a one it is the *love* of Christ that will appeal. But those whose lives have been comparatively easy and quiet, who have had as yet no bitter experience of sin or suffering, may perhaps find in the death of Christ a power that will first kindle the spiritual fire. To quote from a sermon of my father's: "Any man who contemplates the indignity to which Christ was subjected, the shameful

death to which He was condemned by men *who professed to be very tolerably good men*, and were *most respectable members of society*, may well be startled into a consciousness of base principles at work in his own soul, where he has least suspected them." And thus to them also He becomes at last the atonement.

Regarding Him as the Christos, we see a still deeper meaning in the atonement. For though it is the Teacher who awakens the spiritual nature, and intensifies it when awakened, yet it is that spiritual nature alone, the Christ that "liveth in me,"¹ of St Paul, the Higher Self, that can bring about the complete union of man and God. Only as it grows can we become one with the Father. And so it is in truth Christ working in us who redeems us. His death also acquires a new significance in this light. It becomes first a symbol of the slaying of the lower nature in order that the higher may rise triumphant from the grave of the lower. For it was not the Christ that was slain, it was but the human body which He had been using, and which He now needed no longer. That was left to perish, while He Himself passed beyond. So must all that is transitory in us perish before we can become divine. The personality must first be conquered; all the lower desires must be purified, and transmuted into higher energies. And this means the tearing out of the heart of much that has grown dear to us, and has apparently become a very part of ourselves. And after all the personal desires have been overcome, there still remains much difficult and painful discipline to go through.

¹ Galatians, ii, 20.

For the lower desires appear again and again in subtler forms, which must be conquered one by one, till all that belongs to the sense of separateness from our fellows has been swept away, and sympathy and harmony are perfect. Then alone can the Higher Self shine forth in all its radiance.

There is another side from which we may look at the symbolic meaning of the crucifixion of the Christ, one in the light of which it may be said that Christ is being crucified to-day with as much truth as that He was crucified nineteen hundred years ago. We are, indeed, all of us daily crucifying the Higher Self, whenever we allow either personal desire or mere intellect to guide our lives; for these are the two separating forces, and, as we have seen, the very essence of the Higher Self is unity. In this sense we may say that the Christos is crucified in every human being between the two thieves of personal desire and intellect, and only when they recognise the power of the Christos as one of the thieves did in the Christian story does the death give place to the resurrection. This thought is no more peculiar to Christianity than any of the other teachings as to the Christ. Everywhere we find it, though the form under which it appears may vary. In its widest, and perhaps most beautiful application, it brings before our minds the picture of the Logos sacrificing Himself, limiting His life in His universe of form, that other self-conscious beings may share in His bliss. No more beautiful thought occurs in any religion than this; it is, indeed, the very basis and essence of religion itself. And that brings to our minds also the other side of the picture, the patient tenderness with

which the Logos gradually causes all these beings to evolve, drawing out into activity all the divine powers as the forms become able to bear it. And one thinks, then, of the prayer of the Christ on the cross, and seems to hear coming from the crucified spirit in every form of matter, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; and then there seems to come the reply of God Himself: "They are forgiven; for though they know not what they do, crucifying thus the Christos, and hiding it under these veils of matter and desire, I know, and My purpose runs unchanged throughout My universe, for I am in all these forms, and through the very contact with matter which is at present crucifying Me, I am drawing them all to Myself and My eternal joy." This is the triumphant cry that rings out in Christianity, as in all other religions, filling the heart with courage, hope, and trust in the "only Son of God," who is in very truth God Himself in His universe.

There is far more than this in the story of the Christ; many other meanings it has, many other symbolical interpretations, and each one, as it is studied, only brings a deeper and richer meaning into Christianity. But this is not the place to discuss all of these; that must be left to the student who desires to follow up the subject.¹ All that has been attempted here is to show that the cardinal doctrines of Christianity are not contradicted by the conclusions to which the study of Theosophy has led many of its students. A new light may be thrown on these doctrines, and a Christian who

¹ See *Esoteric Christianity*, by A. Besant.

is also an earnest student of Theosophy may put a different interpretation on some of the doctrines from that which is put by certain orthodox churches; but I would venture to claim that such interpretations will be found to be in no sense antagonistic to the teachings of Christ Himself, but rather will be supported by them; and that a Christian who is at the same time an earnest and "believing" student of Theosophy will be a much better Christian than he was before he heard of Theosophy. It cannot be otherwise, for Theosophy is the great whole of which Christianity, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism and all the other great religions of the world, both past and present (and may we say future?), are fragments. In each fragment is enough of the truth to lead men to God, if they but understand and obey it; but if to the truth in the fragment is added the truth from other fragments as well, surely the result cannot fail to be fuller and richer? The dawn is beautiful, and after the darkness of the night it sheds a soft radiance around; but its light pales before the fuller light of day. Theosophy is to any religious system as the day is to the dawn, and those of us who have caught, if only a glimpse of the light of day, wish that others also shall see that light, and that with them, as it has been with us, the dawn of a religious system shall give place to, and usher in, the full daylight of Religion itself.

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